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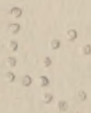
CONN OF THE CORAL SEAS

BY
BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

The Terrible Island
My South Sea Sweetheart

✓ CONN
OF THE CORAL SEAS

BY
Sattel
BEATRICE GRIMSHAW ✓
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THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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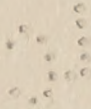
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CONN OF THE CORAL SEAS

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CHAPTER I

IT was in the days of Edward, at Meliasi, capital of the New Cumberland Islands.

It was night, and Meliasi was quiet. Meliasi was usually quiet—forty-one nights out of every forty-two to be explicit. On the forty-second night, the Brand Peters boat came in, and the capital to the end of its one and a half streets, and the last of its nineteen houses, burst into brief and vivid flower. Cocoanut torches flared; red-glassed hurricane lamps, unsteadily displayed by New Cumberland cannibals dancing the waves in canoes, warned the Brand Peters boat not to tear out her vitals on either end of a singularly vicious coral reef; bags of copra, of ivory nuts, fungus, pearl-shell, coffee, bush-vine rubber, were hurried down the wharf; everyone in the township recklessly asked everyone else to dinner, in view of the coming rare feast of fresh meats; the one hotel turned up its proprietorial sleeves, rolled out barrels of beer, brought forth cases of whisky, and set canvas stretchers, prudently, in the shades of the back verandah. . . .

On the forty-one other nights, Meliasi went to bed at eight o'clock in the mosquito season and at half past nine in the "south-east." If you and another gentleman, or several other gentlemen, happened to be playing poker, you might, of course, prefer to go on until daylight, with a "lay-off" of

an hour or so somewhere about twelve; or if you and yet another gentleman, French or English, happened to disagree, as gentlemen will over the cards or the dice, you might like to throw a knife at the other gentleman, or draw your Smith and Wesson to emphasize your views; and this might—as indeed it sometimes did—create such strong local interest, that Meliasi would get up from its beds and mosquito nets, and come out in its pajamas to argue about the result, and call for the cooky boys who, by common consent, were made to do all the burying.

But generally speaking, the town was quiet o' nights. Wonderfully quiet, when you came to realize that the New Cumberlands by reason of the rivalries of two great European powers, were, in those days of Edward, the last, only spot upon earth's surface where nobody (except the cannibals, who, of course, were nobody, anyhow) owned anything at all, where there was no Government, no police, and consequently no law.

There was a British Commissioner perched on the top of a high hill, like St. Simeon Stylites on his tower (and not at all like any saint in any other way). There was a French Commissioner who ran a plantation on an island across the bay, and held, as did his brother of Great Britain, a watching brief for his country. They both watched—by asking each other to dinner, and making things pleasant for rare birds of steamer passengers. Also they ran in stray New Cumberlandians who had shot white men (especially if the New Cumberlandian, imprudently, had eaten his game as well), and kept them for the next calling man-of-war, which promptly hanged them on general principles. Also they shut their eyes, as much as seemed good. . . .

The British Commissioner, on this quiet night, was engaged in watching his French confrère. His French confrère had watched him the last Sunday. (It was fresh turtle steak, dugong bacon, a salad and an omelette for which one would almost have sold one's country.) Blackbury, not to be outdone, had provided a sea-slug soup which he was convinced Des Roseaux could not match if he were fifty times a Frenchman, and ten times over a "born artist in gastronomy"—as Des Roseaux, when warmed with imported wines, would claim to be.

They were not alone. Blackbury, some months before, had in a fit of boredom demanded a secretary from the Colonial Office authorities. He had as much use for a secretary as a frog has for feathers, but the Blackburys were well connected—what is better, usefully connected—so the Colonial Office, after asking only a few score questions and spending only a pound or two on printed forms, red tape and stamps, did what it knew it would do from the beginning, and despatched a clerk who had some sort of reason, apparently, for wanting to bury himself before he was dead. And Blackbury, thenceforward, had someone to play cards with every evening, and a decent bowler to lob him easy practice balls when he felt inclined to uphold British prestige in a good traditional way.

Up on the peaky top of the island, there was wind, though there was none below. In Meliasi harbour, there are many peaked islands, and houses are built on the top of almost every one, for that very benefit of the winds, also because the trade guns used by local chiefs do not carry to a hundred feet or more in height. Blackbury's official island was so near to the township on the mainland that he

could hear and see what was going on in the Avenue Napoleon (where the four little stores and the one great bar were situated) and yet the Residency was often several degrees cooler than the town.

Tonight, the south-east trade, well established, since it was July, and full mid-winter, crashed among the palm-tree tops below the official verandah; the surf, plainly to be seen in the flaring tropic moonlight at a distance of a mile or two away, sang aloud on the coral reef. It was cool—not more than sixty-nine or seventy, here on the top of the island—and it was somehow, with the crash of the wind, and the song of the beating seas, and the racing of the moon among wild clouds, inspiriting. A night when things might happen. A night when one would not be sorry if they did.

Blackbury and Des Roseaux had finished the sea-slug soup—the Secretary refused it with one of his silent gestures—had fed upon viands cunningly disguised, upon salad and sweets, had accepted coffee—such coffee as no one outside the plantation countries dreams of—from the hands of a New Cumberlandian dressed in a red rag and several boar's tusk's bracelets—had strolled out to the verandah, and were leaning on the rail, smoking. Strong upon both, though they were old inhabitants of the islands, was the feeling of far-awayness, of having slipped across the utmost rim of the world, that is known to most white dwellers of Melanesia. Stronger still was the instinct of silence, that hides the thought before it is uttered.

It was nearly ten o'clock, and Meliasi, this being no steamer night, had largely gone to bed. The Frenchman and the Englishman, looking down across the tops of the wind-thrashed, moonlit palms,

and over the narrow strait, saw a street that seemed to be paved with snow, so white was its coral sand surface under the moon; roofs made of unpainted iron that took the same moon so vividly as to look like the typical snowy roofs of an English Christmas card; furry-black shadows under verandah posts; windows invisible, dark as blinded eyes. No lights, save in front of the bar entrance, now closed down to a narrow side door. No people walking the coral sand. Once in a way a dance of shadows across the bright oblong that the bar-room doorway threw upon the road; a Pierrot play of arms and heads and bottles. . . . Not quite all Meliasi was asleep, it seemed, this windy-silver night.

Des Roseaux leaned his arms upon the rail, and sighed, partly because his France was very far away, and partly because the good wines liberally poured by Blackbury were getting in an after affect, and making him feel sad. He was a thin, bearded man with large eyes, and the look of one who carries a romantic story. He had none whatever, and could not have told anyone how, exactly, he had drifted to his present post in the New Cumberlands, or why he did not go away. Blackbury always startled strangers, and caused them to distrust, momentarily, the evidence of their own eyes, by his amazing resemblance to Tenniel's portraits of John Bull—a resemblance which he did his best to keep up by wearing narrow whiskers, longish curling hair, white waistcoats, and coats of dark cotton; besides a white-toothed, genial smile that was as much a part of his daily attire as his collar or his boots. He was a hearty man. They would, in Tenniel's day, have described him as being "of a full habit of body." He roared like a bull when he laughed, ate like an

ostrich, had a flat taste in jokes, and not the slightest appearance of romance, within or without. He knew quite well why he had come to the World's End of the New Cumberlands, fifteen years ago, and why he proposed to stay there; she was most beautiful, and very highly placed, and you are not to be told the story, because it is not credible.

Reginald Blackbury, having had his life, did not approve of ghosts who went back, when they were dead, and haunted the living. So he stayed in the New Cumberlands, and "watched" Great Britian's interests.

Like many bluff, stupid-seeming English of his type, he had keen instincts scarcely recognized by himself. It was he, the gross John Bull, and not the keen Latin by his side, who first noticed that something unusual was afoot down in that quiet main street of Meliasi, where the bar-room shed its light upon the mimic coral snow. One could not see in, but one could see the shadow-play in the vivid glare cast by the naphtha lights, and things were undoubtedly becoming livelier.

Blackbury smoked quietly, and watched. Was not he watching his job?

It was not an ordinary bar-room row; if it had been, it would scarcely have interested him. Riley's, for years, had been the spring and origin of almost every fight in Meliasi. This was something different. Men seemed to be moving about excitedly, talking with waved hands and emphatic gestures; snatching hats, at last, and cramming them on heads. A trader appeared at the door of the bar, forcing a bottle into his pocket; he had bread in his hands, he was hurriedly stowing it away about his person.

"Bread—provisions—at ten o'clock at night," re-

marked Blackbury's subconscious self, taking notes. His other self, at the same time, cut the end off a cigar, lighted it, and listened, more or less, to what Des Roseaux was saying about the next steamer. It seemed that a rumor had drifted up, through the "wireless" of a man-of-war, to the effect that there was a lady passenger on board, someone bound to the Mission as a guest, but nobody knew if it was true. The Mission rather thought not; they had not had any intimation by the previous steamer. Des Roseaux, nevertheless, excited by the possibility, had hypnotized himself into the belief that she certainly was coming and that she was young and very fair.

"I feel it, I do not know how," he explained. "I think she is going to come, she is going to be beautiful, she will give some of us the occasion again to fall in love. . . ."

Another trader appeared in Riley's doorway, a stocky man who cast a short thick shadow. This man wasted no time, as the first had done, disposing packages and talking. He crammed his hat on his head, and made a straight bolt for the street. He was followed by others; Riley's seemed vomiting forth every customer. Up on the top of the hill, in the roar of the trade, one could of course hear nothing, but one could almost see the shouting and talking. . . .

"Not a white woman in this cursed island under thirty-five, I swear you," went on Des Roseaux. "And for looks—bah! But this one, she will be new from the winds and snows of the south, that make beauty as they make spring flowers; she will—"

"By Gad!" cried Blackbury, interrupting without ceremony. "It's Steve Conn again!"

"Hurroo!" said the Frenchman, jumping up and

beginning what he imagined to be a jig. "Begora, my spalpeen, are they there again, sure? Jabers me, but I will back the wild Irishman against all the other whillaloos. Hurroo!" He waved his arms above his head.

Nobody noticed him. Blackbury was craning out to watch the crowd below; the Secretary in the background was looking at his chief with an air of inquiry. He was new to the Cumberlands. He did not, apparently, understand them, nor did the Cumberlands, for the matter of that, understand him, save for a certain perception of social values that caused them to describe him, scornfully, as "one of the yaw-haws."

"Gad," said Blackbury again, "it's that right enough. Well, they haven't had a Conn hunt for a year now. Wish them joy of it."

Des Roseaux evidently understood, for he uttered joyful little cries, and feigned to be a fox-hunter taking fences. "Tally-ho," said the versatile Des Roseaux, quite unaffected by his audience's neglect. "Tally-ho. Gone—gone off!" He hung over the verandah and waved.

In the moonlight, over the coral snow, Riley's customers went scuttering down the street. One or two had horses, those mounted galloped madly off. A man who was walking and running alternately stopped a wandering native, made him uncock the gun he carried over his shoulder (a common preliminary to any talk with New Cumberland cannibals) and appeared to question him. The native pointed negligently, with the butt of his rifle, towards the forest that lay close-furred up the hills behind Meliasi. The white man nodded and ran on. He, too, had a lump of bread, and was stuffing it into his

shirt as he ran. He had a tin as well; it lumped out big and square from the pocket on one hip.

"Bet you a sovereign even, he wins again," said Blackbury suddenly.

"I won't take it; not enough good," was Des Roseaux's reply. "I take you five to one."

"No fear," answered the representative of Britain's Majesty. "Some day, they'll get him, sure as eggs."

"What is it about?" asked the Secretary, coming forward a step. He had evidently had a struggle with himself before giving way so far.

"Conn," replied Blackbury, putting back his cigar and speaking from one corner of his mouth. "Conn the Hundred Fighter."

"Really?" was the Secretary's comment. You would have thought he understood.

Blackbury, of course, knew that he did not; that he was merely playing secretary.

"There was an Irish King," he condescended to explain, "a couple of thousand years ago. That was what they called him. Conn thinks he's descended from him."

"And is he?"

"Well, you know, all Irish are descended from kings; you may have noticed it—"

"I think I have." There might or might not have been a slight flavour of acid in the reply.

"But perhaps Conn is a little more so than most. At any rate, he's a damned useful sort with his fists, and some of the pearling crowd who have an O' before their names pinned the label on, just for fun. That was before they got to know about this hidden treasure business, but since then he's fairly earned the name, for he's fought all Meliasi about it, in a way,

and won, in a way. There's nothing absolute about that sort of a win."

The Secretary waited till Blackbury had quite done, and then asked:

"What is the hidden treasure business?"

"Should have thought you knew—but you don't seem much of a mixer, my boy. Now, I—but about the treasure. I can't tell you because I don't know. Nobody knows. We all know Conn is simply rolling in riches, and gets them here, but that's all."

"Here? In the New Cumberlands?"

"Here, on this very island of the New Cumberlands, perhaps quite close to Meliasi. Nobody knows. He disappears sometimes for a while, and usually no one is aware of it till he's back, but once in a way he's missed, and then the whole town does as you see tonight, and gets on the hunt after him."

"But that," said the Secretary, "is very remarkable."

"My friend," observed the French Commissioner, "it is more than remarkable, it is a miracle. There is nothing that excites every passion of humanity as the thirst of gold; it makes the lazy one industrious, the stupid cunning, the coward it makes a brave man, and yet, bless my soul, with all the New Cumberlands unnaturally stimulated, until up to its very best to fight him, there is that Conn who wins!"

The Secretary listened with his usual patience to the end, and then asked: "Is it gold, then?"

"Flute! What does one know? Something that's worth gold. They say there is none in the New Cumberlands—but most of them are unexplored. Me, I think it is gold, but John Bull here, he'll not have it."

Blackbury, smiling all over his wide, whiskered face, shook his head.

"No, my boy," he said. "There's too much mess about gold. You can't hide the workings."

"In the mountains, unexplored, why not?"

"Maybe—if they weren't unexplored. But they are, and likely to stop so, until there's law to disarm these beggars of natives. I don't believe Conn gets away in there. They'd eat him."

"Perhaps," suggested the Secretary, a spark showing in his eyes—they were dark, uncommon eyes with a boring strength behind them, ill suited to his white, inexpressive face—"Perhaps this Mr. Conn has an unusual influence over the natives. Such things have been known."

"By Gad, they have," agreed Blackbury musingly. "Pendragon—not so many years ago, with his crew of fighting cannibals—if anyone ever was King of the Cumberlands, it was he, till they got him and tied him to his mast, and cut him up alive, to feed the fishes. And there was a woman once—dead now—she was an ex-convict, who'd some grudge against the world; a Frenchwoman—"

"I remember," from Des Roseaux. "It was the year before I came; she died of fever, nothing more. She was the veritable queen of Aolani; half a lifetime. An island, I give you my word, where the man-of-war crews scarcely dare arrive today. Of other people, no one. But she was their queen. Yes, these islands of the West have such histories."

The Secretary listened, motionless.

"But about Conn," burst in the British Commissioner's rich voice—a voice to match his person, and the good English port stored in his hurricane cellar—"he's something more than king of a pack of na-

tives, because he's rich, where all of us are damned poor. Conn runs my islands for me, more or less, the dashed—"

Des Roseaux patted Blackbury's sleeve gently.

"My islands, John Bull, if you please; the islands of my country."

Blackbury laughed. The two were excellent friends, especially when they disagreed.

"Our islands, Rosy, if you like. Well, Conn runs them. Deny it if you can."

"He has not," said the Frenchman scornfully, "any intellectual influence. And where it is a question of France, and the sons of France, the intellect—"

"I believe the beggar has a T. C. D. degree," allowed Blackbury.

"Really," was the Secretary's remark.

"Don't be a scornful little dog," warned Blackbury humorously. "You are only 'Londiniensis' yourself, and one's as good as another."

"You have a degree of Oxford," said the Frenchman. He had none himself, but he was prepared to uphold the prestige of all Commissioners in front of all secretaries at any time.

"Would have had, if I hadn't got sent down for a row about a girl three weeks too soon," corrected the Briton. "What does it all matter to dead men?"

No one seemed able to answer. The Frenchman politely choked back a yawn. It was getting slow. Riley's was shut for the night. Down in the street below, the Conn hunters had disappeared. The moon, not yet at full, was climbing down the sky. If one did not wish to get back to one's island in the dark. . . .

The Commissioner who "watched" for France

rose to his feet, bowed from his waist, and took formal leave.

"That pearlers' island, they are very drunk this two days and nights," he explained. "Hopkins and Fursey I have seen down in the street, who went off on the Conn hunt. Sometimes when they have drunk, I have known them who fired at me from their beach as I went in my whaleboat. It is best I should get back before they find that Mr. Conn is not to be found, and return."

"Fursey is the worst," stated Blackbury. "I've half a mind to set the man-of-war on him when she comes along again—though God knows when that will be."

"He's the pearler who made that trouble about the three native girls, isn't he, sir?" asked the Secretary.

"Yes. He'll have us all in the cooking pots one of these days, with his dashed nonsense. It doesn't pay to meddle with the New Cumberland women; nothing so likely to raise a general insurrection. And Fursey is a poisonous nuisance with women, black, white and tan. You remember Guilbert's wife, and the scandal over the nurse who came up for the round trip on the boat? And—well, I don't know how it is that none of you duelling fire-eaters of French have never shot him, yet."

"It would be a good work," agreed Des Roseaux, with calmness. "But in the meantime, I must hurry myself, to get myself home before he is back. Good-night, Your Excellency. I thank you for a most agreeable evening. No, do not take the trouble—" to the Secretary, who was silently seeing him out. "If you will—well, good-night, Mr.— I am sorry, I forget your name again."

"Gatehouse," supplied the young man. He was already familiar with the notorious "New Cumberland memory."

"I am sorry, never can I think of anything but Lodge. It is my fault. Good-night, Mr. Gatehouse, take good care of His Excellency for me."

"He and you are not really Excellencies, are you?" demanded Gatehouse. The point seemed to interest him.

Des Roseaux made an inexpressible gesture with his fine French hands.

"We are bluff, dear Mr. Gatehouse—bluff, both two. We name ourselves Excellent, if we like. It is only another bluff. Yet, nevertheless, no one can call our bluff for us—that is as the Americans say. Behind, there is our mans-of-war, and they are not bluff. No, we are more kings than it would seem."

"Good-night," bowed Gatehouse, on the steps. His eyes were bright. They dulled as he went back to the verandah, where Blackbury, looking more like John Bull than ever, so that one really missed the top-boots, was already shuffling a pack of cards for his nightly game.

Some two hours later, the Commissioner, having won a rubber of whist and taken a lesson, besides, in the new game of "bridge" that Gatehouse had brought out with him from Home, poured himself a final whisky, and began thinking of bed. The Secretary had gone off as soon as released. It was late now; the moon was down, the wind had fallen, and the waters of Meliasi's matchless harbour, island-strewn, were like a shield of grey steel set with dark bosses of marble and moss-agate. The breath of the night, filled as all midnight airs are filled, with things mysterious, dark hopes; fragments and sparks

of dreams that belong, in their entirety, to no one soul, but to the souls of all the present and the past; the call that most men hear, and many follow, and no man understands, crept upwards from the bush. What breeze there was, was land-breeze now; it is so, when the small hours dawn.

Blackbury, slowly drinking his whisky, and looking out at nowhere with his John Bull face, may have heard these things, or only felt them, or perhaps not even felt them. With the John Bulls, one does not know.

There came a sound at the verandah entrance. The Commissioner's face was unmoved as he turned his head to listen, but there was nothing slow about the way he reached for the sawed-off shotgun that stood in a corner near his chair, and slung it to his shoulder. In the New Cumberlands, you never can tell. . . .

With the gun ready, and his half-finished glass at his elbow, he listened a moment longer. The sound of a shod heel—rubber shod—came to his ear. He lowered the gun, replaced it, and took up his glass again. Through the bottom of it, as he finished, he saw a white man advancing towards his chair. He nodded, and drank the last mouthful.

"Well," he said, setting down the glass, "you're a nice kind of young man to come calling here in the middle of the night, I don't think,—after setting the town by the ears. Do you know all Meliasi, *and* Dan Fursey, are out hunting you?"

The caller, without making any reply, came forward to a tray-laden table that stood at the Commissioner's elbow, poured himself a drink, and threw it down his throat. Blackbury looked at him through narrowed eyelids. He was yellow, as white men

in the tropics are when they turn pale, and there were marks beneath his eyes. His clothes were extremely dirty, and his shoes cut about. It did not take much to see that he had been having a strenuous time, somehow, somewhere or other, and that not long ago. The man was tall, and looked taller; he might have been thirty to thirty-five. He had fair dry hair, sticking up about the parting; a shaven face that had not been shaved for two days; grey, rather insolent eyes as hard as glass. You felt, looking at him, that he did not care a little curse what you thought of him. You liked him for it, rather. When you had been taking stock of him for some time, you discovered that he was good looking, and then you forgot it again, because that seemed a little thing. When he went away, things seemed to slacken down, one stretched one's feet, and yawned, with a sense of ease, that was somehow, at the same time, a sense of emptiness. His name was Stephen Conn.

Blackbury seemed to know his visitor. He waited till Conn had swallowed a temperate drink, and then handed him a plate of sandwiches. Conn ate a few, quietly and not in any hurry. The Commissioner waited for him to speak, which he did presently, wiping his fingers on a napkin, and not looking up.

"I'd as soon you could get Fursey deported on some pretext or other."

"May one ask why?"

"Certainly. He has shot at me once or twice too often, and you know I don't like killing people."

"I know it's not one of your habits, as Denys in 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' said about marriage. Why does the excellent Fursey try to kill

the gander that has the golden eggs, and won't tell where they are? It'd seem to be foolish of Fursey."

"He is foolish. He thinks I've got the natives terrorized, and that if I were out of the way, he could make them talk." Conn looked up now. There was something good in that glass-hard glance of his. Blackbury thought, as he had often thought before—"The chap is no liar."

"Well," he said aloud, "I'll see if I can't stick him with some of his crimes by the time we have the next man-of-war. They could take him down to jail in Fiji. I can swear he's a danger to British interests here, with his dashed inconsiderate ways about the native women. That'll make them sit up."

"Thanks," said Conn, rising to his feet.

"Off home?"

"Yes, I had"—with a little break of laughter that lit up the hard face into sudden boyishness,—
"I had a run for it."

"What, they nearly caught you?"

"Oh, no. They don't do that. But I had a mind to let them go off on a wild-goose chase, and so I had to show myself, and double. They're half across the island by now. Fursey," he added inconsequently, "Fursey is a rotten bad shot, for one of the pearling crowd."

"Did he—?"

"Twice."

"Oh, you know, that's too bad altogether. I don't mind rows among the pearlers' island crew, but when they get to potting my friends—he'll get his medicine, and as soon as possible. I'll try and stick him with something. I wish they would get ahead with this wireless business they keep talking so much of. Handy in places like Meliasi. You pass Fursey's

island on your way? Well, they're all off tonight. Des Roseaux has been annoyed by them lately, he says. They pick up that habit of miscellaneous potting from the natives—and a good deal more. I'd like to get the Admiralty to buy Punnett for a gun target, as they bought Five Stick. Night-night. I ought to have won a pound on you this time, but Des Roseaux said—oh, he's gone, uncivil beggar. . . . Time for bed, Reginald, my boy. Reg, you're gettin' old."

CHAPTER II

DEIRDRE ROSE, in the dying years of the nineteenth century, lived a life of dreams.

It is not possible, now-a-days, for a girl to live in dreams. The age of machinery, heralded nearly a century ago, has finally come into its own within the last score of years, and the girl of today has been swept into a whirlpool of mechanical activities and interests unthought of by her mother, and incompatible with the dreaming habit of mind. If you dream when steering a car through thick traffic, you will wake to a reality of murder or suicide.

If you fall into a trance of becoming dismay when the motor-bike you bestride gets stringhalt in its carburetor, you will be left by the roadside to spend the night. The war-girl, handling high explosives through long years, learned, if never before, to nip the dreaming habit before it had time to bud; she might have dreamed a factory full of workers into red gobbets for the crows. . . .

But there were no motors, nor was there war or thought of war in all the world, when Victoria was queen, and Deirdre Rose, a girl. Nor was there any hurry. There was always time for everything, and summers, even in Northern Ireland, were ages and ages long.

When you lived in a large brick and stone square building set on a green terrace, somewhere up a

mountainside away from towns, and your father was dead, and your stepmother possessed by a passion for making calls in a slow stately landau (who has seen landaus in these days?) and your stepsister was always willing to go with her, so that you were left much, much and happily, alone—how would you keep from dreaming? Above all when you were what all girls fancy themselves, and what Deirdre Rose truly was—"not like others."

She was pretty to begin with. She had what matters most, the perfect mouth—smallish, short in the upper lip, and very red; it tilted upward like the mouth of a Bacchante or a faun, and looked as if it smiled, even when Deirdre was not smiling. She had the egg-shaped cheek of beauty, the running "streamline" of neck and shoulder that is like a strain of music, the look of mistiness and colour about the hair, the out-watching starriness of eyes, that are the letters from which the great word "beauty" may be spelled.

She had a figure that was slight where it should be slight, and rounded where girlish roundnesses should be. She was limbed like a young cat (than which there is nothing more graceful) and her foot, like the typical foot of her generation, was small. Deirdre had all the prettinesses. Yet—

Mabel, her stepsister, twenty-three, where Deirdre was but twenty; short-waisted, with a pulpy mouth and a high colour—Mabel had admirers, two or three of them. Deirdre had not any. When they went to dances together, Mabel filled her programme speedily, and Deirdre sat as often as she danced. Deirdre did not mind. She was a dreamer. And the men of Northern Ireland were not her dream. They were hard, they talked of business,

they had accents with sharp corners and inflexions. Mabel, who was in love with a Belfast spinner, aged twenty-nine, and as hard-surfaced as his own steel spindles, told Deirdre that the north was dark and true—she could not honestly say tender—and Deirdre, the girl who was different, looked out of the window towards the sea that glimmered five miles off, beyond the spiring chimneys of Belfast, and finished the line—

“*‘Bright and fierce and fickle is the south’*—Give me the south, Mab, I don’t like dark things.”

“Henry’s hair is fair,” objected Mab.

“It’s red. No matter, I meant the inside of Henry, not the outside.”

“What *do* you want, then, dear?”

“Chocolates,” answered Deirdre, producing a box. It was her way of changing the conversation. Could she say to Mab—Mab, the girl whose world lay inside a wedding veil, and a ring—what she wanted, she who was different? Could she tell her how words, lines, names in geography books, even, hypnotized her, and repeated again and again the call that, she was sure as death, she must answer one of these days?

Foolish little spells they were, to raise up spirits so strong. They had begun their work in the school-room. Lines in Smith’s Grammar, in Cornwell’s Geography—absurd!

“*He looked thoughtfully towards the glimmering sea-line.*” When she read that example, it was not an example to her. It was a window, suddenly opened, and looking out miles and thousands of miles away. It made her tremble. . . .

The names of the Irish mountain ranges, strung in a row to be learnt off by heart, were full of a

mystic wonder, a beauty that she could not have explained or told. "The Mourne, the Slieve Bloom, the Galtees, the Blackstairs, the Knockmealdown"—they sounded like bells rung at evening to her. And yet it was not they that she desired. It was something that they meant.

How could one tell such things to a stepsister Mabel, who giggled about young men and attentions? Deirdre knew, knew fiercely, that she would never care about young men. They stood in the way of everything. . . .

The widow, her stepmother, was a Victorian in every sense of the word; she believed in having a girl taught by suitable governesses, made to say her prayers and sit straight in her chair, confirmed at the right time, in the right dress, and taken out to dances at the right age. The rest was on the knees of the gods—if Mrs. Rose ever thought of using such an expression, which she never did, knees being hardly delicate, in Victoria's day.

The daughter of Mrs. Rose's half English, half South Ireland husband was as much a mystery to her as dead Dennis Rose himself had been. Wiser than she knew she was, she let Deirdre alone. And Deirdre dreamed. . . .

I like to think of her in the leisurely days of that nineteenth century end, that was the end of all leisure, riding the Antrim roads among the rust-red and lilac hills, on her quiet "aged" brown horse—her dress, a long green "habit" with tight buttoned shell-jacket, green trousers peeping out modestly, when she cantered, over little polished boots, in her gloved hand a gold and amber whip. I like to think of that time, of the lull before the storm, of the

quiet dawn that ushered in a noon of happenings strange, wild, terrible. . . .

Deirdre, with beauty in her face that the North Antrim mill-owner could neither understand nor desire—Deidre, with the hot heart and roaming foot of the world's eternal gypsy breed—Deidre, cursed or blessed—who knows?—with the terrible gift of "unlikeness"—Deirdre, the wanderer, the fated, riding softly among still home lanes in Maytime, dreams in her eyes, and peace that was to last so little time upon her untouched, girlish lips—when I see her thus, I think that I am listening in an old, Venetianed, rose-bowl-scented drawing room, to one of those Mendelssohn "Lieder" long since out of fashion; to its cold brightness, its plaintive melody, its gentle sunset sadness. They always seemed, those old Lieder, to be softly regretting something; telling some story of lost peace.

The break came, as it comes in different guise, to all. It came to Mabel first, as a wedding in St. Anne's, and a white satin dress, and a wreath and veil, and bridesmaids and a honeymoon and a villa in Balmoral—and a husband. Deirdre grew restless, what her stepmother called troublesome, after Mabel was gone. Mrs. Rose thought and said that she was jealous of Mabel's settlement in life.

"Good God," said Deirdre, standing very straight and slim before the window away from the fire (it was a wild March day, a day calling to the blood of youth) "you talk of settlement in life—I want no settlement anywhere till I find one under ground. Let me go, mamma. Let me see the world."

"You talk as if you were a man," said the stepmother, with cold eyes.

"Why not?" said Deirdre fiercely. "What is there a man can do that I can't?"

"Oh, I know you learned all sorts of Latin and counterpoint and things, my dear; I ought to know, since I paid—but that isn't all. A girl can't be like a man. She must be taken care of. She can't take care of herself."

"I can."

"No, dear, not unless you were a married woman or a widow. A girl can't go rambling about alone."

"A married woman can?"

"Certainly. But you don't seem like marrying."

"It is the last thing on earth—" began Deirdre.

No woman can live through a lifetime that includes marriage, motherhood, and widowhood, and remain altogether a fool. Mrs. Rose was not so simple as you or I might have thought; not quite so narrow as she looked. She threw a glance at Deirdre's flushed, undoubtedly fair face, and it struck her, for the first time, but with force, that Deirdre was as sure to know love as a flower is sure, in time, to feel, and open to the sun.

"Don't talk nonsense, dear," was all she said placidly. But a certain uneasiness about this wild bird of a stepdaughter—this handsome creature who did not love, and was not loved, and wanted to go roaming the wide world all alone—preposterous!—urged her to "do something." The something took the form of a long visit to an aunt in Dublin; of study, there, for a degree. What good the letters "B. A." after her name would do the girl, if any, she could not conceive, but Deirdre took to the plan, and it would keep her, the stepmother reflected, out of mischief.

"Dennis knew his own blood," she thought, "when

he made that will. There is no need for her to know anything about it. But even if she did, she could do nothing."

For Rose, when dying, fourteen years before, had left all the small sum he owned (the bulk of income being his second wife's) to Deirdre, child of his first, best love. But with a certain strain of caution that few people had expected of him, he placed the money in the hands of two trustees, one his wife, the other a lawyer, until Deirdre should marry, or reach the age of six and twenty.

"She can't touch it for another five years," thought Mrs. Rose, and felt vaguely comforted. She was not the grasping stepmother of fiction; Deirdre's small hoard had increased rather than diminished in her care—but she was vaguely uneasy as to what the girl might do with it. . . .

In four months' time, Deirdre, who "knew nothing" about the money, wrote from Dublin to say that she was married, asked for her fortune of seven thousand odd to be paid in full, and signed herself, amazingly, "Deirdre Rose."

Mrs. Rose took the first train to Dublin, arrived horrified, indignant and reproachful. The aunt, descended upon first, declared she knew nothing, and did not think it could be true. Deirdre had been going in and out to her classes just as usual; was at that moment in lecture; would be home to lunch.

. . . Confronted with the letter, she opined it must be a hoax, or a silly attempt to get hold of the money. Why had the girl signed herself Rose?

The stepmother, fortified by cake and wine, consented to believe the best. It had, she confessed, given her a terrible shock—she had not known what to think.

"Whatever nonsense she may or may not have been up to," said the aunt, "I can tell you, Deirdre is a perfectly *good* girl."

"Of course," said Mrs. Rose, who did not think it of course at all—otherwise she had not needed that Genoa cake and invalid port to brighten up the outlook.

Deirdre, at lunch time, arrived dressed in a tailor made, not new, and an everyday hat, and carrying a strap of notebooks. Anything less like a runaway bride, no one, surely, had ever seen.

"Deirdre," demanded the stepmother, panting, as she felt she ought, "what have you done? What do you MEAN?"

Deirdre unstrapped her notebooks, took off her hat, and tidied her hair at the chimney glass.

"I told you. I'm married," she said, smoothing down a curl of her fringe. "I can do exactly as I like now. I mean to take my degree—the exam's in three weeks—and then realize my money, and—"

"Good gracious, heavens, girl," demanded the maddened lady, who stood for Propriety and the World, "who have you married—who has dared to—"

"You ought to say whom, mamma. I married Mr. Rogers on Monday afternoon, at the North Circular Road Registry office."

"You dare to stand up and tell me—where is he?"

"I don't know. He ought to be in lecture in another ten minutes, but we're not in the same year, you know—he's going up for his M. A. If you want to see him, you could catch him coming out of the Latin. Or you could find him in the Gaiety tonight

—he said something on Monday about having tickets for Wednesday, with friends.”

“In the name of goodness, you unlucky child, what is the man’s address?”

“Don’t go goodnessing about, mamma, there’s no need. I’ll get you the address if you really want it. I don’t know it myself. I never went to tea with any of the students, it’s not my form.”

“Deirdre, are you married to this man, or is it all a wicked joke?”

“I wish you wouldn’t go calling him ‘this man,’ mamma, it sounds so stagey, and so impolite too. There’s no ‘this man’ about the case at all. Mr. Rogers has been the very kindest, most chivalrous gentleman I ever imagined—I never thought any man could be such a perfect knight. He is a revolutionary—”

“Deirdre!”

“They are quite respectable, mamma; they only want freedom and the brotherhood of man, and they think a woman has the right to lead her own life, only social conventions beat her down, and Mr. Rogers was reading the life of Sonia Kovalevsky, and so was I—”

“Who?”

“Sonia Kovalevsky. The greatest woman mathematician the world ever knew. And her people kept her down, and gave her no freedom, so she made a student marriage, and became free. So I told Mr. Rogers how I loved the book, and I told him about my money—all those records are in the Registrar General’s place, you know; one can see wills—and I said how I was kept down and had no freedom, and how I knew I was not like other women, and would never, never love. And what do you think he said?”

"I can guess—when you mentioned the seven thousand."

"No, you can't, mamma, for he said he would be married like Sonia Kovalesky, a student marriage, and that he'd execute a deed of settlement of every penny on me, the minute the marriage was done. And he brought it in his pocket, and it was signed and witnessed, and he gave it to me and bowed—so chivalrously, and raised my hand to—that is, he bowed, and went away."

"Went away?"

"Of course. That's a student marriage. But I can easily look him up some time today, and tell him you want to see him. Only don't row him, mamma, for he's been most obliging."

Deirdre turned to the glass again, drew a hairpin out, put it back, looked at her fingers, somewhat ink-stained, and asking, "Where is the pumice stone?" left the room.

The two older women, planted opposite each other on the sofa, stared for a moment, and then exclaimed, almost together:

"Good Lord, Blanche!"

"Did you ever, Clara?"

There was silence—a pregnant silence—for some seconds after.

It was broken by Mrs. Rose, who burst into tears.

"I don't blame you, Clara," she sobbed, "I know what Deirdre is—no one could ever manage her—but this is a terrible, terrible thing."

"The man," said Aunt Clara, "seems to have behaved better than anyone could have expected."

"Oh, that's all very well, but what are we to look for? She's legally married to him, and he can't be quite such a fool as he seems to be. Mark my

words, Clara, we'll hear more of it before long. He's only biding his time. If there was a man in the family to deal with the fellow—"

"We can get Mr. Canning." Canning was the co-trustee.

"Yes. But it wants a young man—to deal with him—"

"If you mean fight him, Blanche, I don't agree with you. He seems to be simply a hot-headed young ass who thinks himself a Red Republican as somebody says we all do at twenty-five—"

"I *never* did."

"I don't suppose so. But most men do. This Rogers is one of your romantics, damsel in distress, and all that, mixed up with red ties and socialism, of a harmless kind. We've only got to put it to him properly—with the lawyer to help—and he'll see the boot is quite on the other leg, and that the most chivalrous thing he can do is to get out of it, and enable her to get out. It could be done, you know. He could desert her, and refuse maintenance, or something of that kind. And after two years—Sh, there she is."

Deirdre came back into the drawing room, hands washed, books put away.

"Isn't there any lunch but cake?" she asked.

"I suppose Jane has laid it by now. Will you come in, Blanche?"

"I'm horribly hungry," said Deirdre, leading the way.

"Do you suppose," asked her stepmother tragically, in the dark of the passage leading from downstairs sitting room to dining room, "that that man is going to leave you alone, you misguided girl?"

"Oh, yes, mamma. I don't take any interest in

him at all, except that I am grateful to him. And he really doesn't want to be bothered with me." Deirdre opened the dining-room door.

"Do you think," said her stepmother, pausing on the threshold, "do you really think, poor child, that you aren't going to see him again?"

"Of course I do," answered Deirdre. "Except coming out of lecture." She broke off the conversation, of which she seemed to have had enough, and began hurriedly carving the lunch.

Deirdre was right. As things drew out in the long run, she was even more right than she expected to be. For Mr. Rogers did not come to two o'clock Latin lecture or to any other, and from that day, the girl he had married did not see him again.

Her aunt and her stepmother made inquiries. They learned from the college books that Rogers had been an independent student; paid his own fees, the son of an English gentleman, deceased. Irregular in attendance, but a good student on the whole. Only address, 940, Lower Mount Street—an apartment house. They called and heard that Mr. Rogers was away.

.

So Deirdre, ill-fated, tied about her neck with careless hands the slip-knotted noose that is marriage. But instead of the end carried in the hand of one, it was with her the end left loose to all the winds of Heaven, trailing where strange fingers might snatch, or idle foot might tread. . . . She did not know. She was not, for years, to know how far the noose might lead her; how sharp its drag might be.

CHAPTER III

IT was Tahiti, and it was afternoon.

It is always afternoon in Tahiti, even at seven o'clock in the morning. Under the dreaming peaks of Orohena, with the long light growing among the palms, and the reef, a harp to the waking fingers of the "trade," beginning once more its age-old song, one can scarce believe that seven of the morning is the same seven that, in far cities:

"Casts a sullen glance
Rousing each caitiff to his task of care,
Of sinful man the sad inheritance."

The air of afternoon—summer afternoon, eternal summer—lies always warm upon the islands, above all on Tahiti. But when the light is really on the wane, and the reef-birds begin their crying, and the royal domes of the mangoes, most glorious of tropic trees, grow gold-green, dusk-green, dark, then the spirit of all the afternoons the world has ever known,—their languor, their pathos, their drugged and honeyed sorrow falls on Tahiti and claims it for its own. . . .

They were playing something, in the half-dark drawing room of the Papeete hotel—something that suited, strangely, the place and hour. It was as if the island, ready for sleep, was singing to itself as

it drowsed away into dreams. One did not know who was playing, nor did one think. It was the sunset that made the music—the trade-wind, dying among the palms—the ripple of the tideless, green lagoon not fifty yards away. . . .

The music paused, changed, and glided into a song. Someone was singing. This was not the sunset or the palms; it was a woman. She had a shadowy voice, not strong, but full of charm. She sang, softly, a little gypsy road-song, that left your heart aching, you did not know why. The voice paused, on a broken note, and ended.

“Jove!” said someone on the verandah. It was near dinner time; the people from the steamer were waiting for their food.

“Hush,” whispered an officious voice, “don’t say anything, she’ll stop if you do.”

“Who is it?” in a hissing whisper.

“Herself—Deirdre. Oh, do be quiet—she’s going to begin again.”

The voice recommenced. This time it was a sea-song, the song of a sailor’s love. You know it; since those days, it has been sung to death in every drawing room. But then it was new, and the steamer folk, waiting for their dinner, had never heard it. They clapped, at the end, loudly.

“Now you’ve done it,” whispered the officious lady. “She’ll stop. Probably she thought she was alone.”

“Jove,” said the man, “it was good. I’ll get that; do you think it’s out?”

Nobody listened to him. They were absorbed in staring at the little lady—not so very little either, but her graceful slimness made her look small—who had just come from the inner room. Not much more

than a girl, they judged her, some thirty years of age at most, pretty, distinguished looking, somewhat wistfully sad. But that, of course, was accounted for by the mourning she wore. Her dress was not white like all the other dresses on the hotel verandah. It was black, a black delicately thin, and full of suggestions of soft white laces and ruffles underneath—but black for all that. She wore stockings of white silk—in mosquito countries, the black stocking is a trap for trouble—and very small black silk shoes with a sparkling dewdrop of paste on each. Her dusky hair was piled high on her head, and snooded round with a silver ribbon. She wore a silver chain about her neck, no other jewellery, save a plain gold ring on the flower-like left hand that hung, white and drooping, against the black of her dress.

When she saw the crowd on the verandah, she turned a little aside, slipped through a pair of bead curtains that concealed an inconspicuous doorway, and vanished.

Out burst the flood of talk. The whispering lady belonged to the town; she knew everybody and everything in Papeete—and more. To her the newcomers turned. Was that the wonderful little songwriter who had cut out Laurence Hope and her school? The woman who had written and composed "Your Shadow On My Heart," "Gypsy Lover," "My Love Has Wedded the Sea-Wind," "Home, Home to You," and a score of other wander-songs and wanderer love-songs, haunting, fascinating, poignantly sweet and sad? You could not help humming "Deirdre's" songs over and over to yourself, once you had heard them. You could not rest till you had sung them to him, or her. The world was lis-

tening to "Deirdre's" music; making love in her words.

This was certainly "Deirdre," the whispering lady assured the steamer folk. Her real name was nothing very pretty, Mrs. Rogers, and she was a widow, and she travelled about everywhere, all over the world, it was said; she never stayed long anywhere. She was in the islands for a little while now. She would not talk very much to anyone; she seemed a trifle unsociable; she had a few acquaintances or friends here and there, and kept to them. They might hear her again, very likely would. . . . Yes, it was not much of a voice, but so very sweet—and then those songs were not meant to be sung loud; that was the great charm of them—any voice could sing them. It was said "Deirdre" was making money out of them, but composers never grew rich. She did not dress like a wealthy woman. Good taste? Oh, yes, but one always knew. . . . Widow? Yes, not very recently either, so it seemed. Probably she had some kind of a history; indeed, people did say she had been divorced or something. She must have had heaps of love affairs—look at her face, and the very way she walked across a room—that always told you—and then the songs, they were quite suitable songs, you know, nothing not fitted for a drawing room, but they were very passionate—wonderful! You felt, when you heard them, that you must be in love with somebody, whether you were or not. Remarkable gift. Remarkable woman—and hardly more than a girl. . . .

In her own bedroom, which was cool at this evening hour, and cloyingly sweet, with the scent of the tiéré trees outside, the "remarkable woman" sat on her bed, and looked out at the last rays of the

sunset dying over the reef. There was a pile of her own songs on a table; a sheaf of press cuttings beside them. Photographs of singers, autographed, hung about the room; they had been sent to her from all over Europe and America. She was famous in her way; pointed out everywhere she went as "Deirdre," the new young composer; the writer of songs and words that had touched the hearts of lovers all the world through. Deirdre, once Deirdre Rose, had had her wish of wandering, full measure, pressed down, and running over. She had found herself in her wanderings, and found her work. It was to write the love-songs of the world—she who had not, and never must have, love.

Deirdre was eight and twenty. She had had seven years, since that mad day of the "student marriage," to learn exactly what it was that she had done, when she lightheartedly tied a noose about her neck for freedom's sake. She had seen the world, read the great book of men and women, and found it very different from the books of ink and paper, on which her young girlhood had been fed. In books there was "one love, one life" for everyone, no more; sometimes, indeed, there was less—one remembered the charming men of fiction, who had never even thought of any woman until, at forty or thereabouts, they met the heroine; the fascinating woman who one felt quite sure would have gone through life loved, but never won, if they had not, about the second chapter, just chanced to come across the hero. . . . Eliminate that chance, and you had the touching picture of a lovable, loving-hearted man or woman who managed to get through life without ever loving, in the great sense, anyone at all.

In fiction, it always worked. In life, Deirdre had learned and learned again, it did not.

There was always the man for the woman, always the woman for the man—and all the time. That was where fiction parted from life and went, shrieking, down the ways of time alone. The hero did not wait for the heroine to fall in love. He fell in love continuously; sometimes he managed to clear the stage for the heroine, and sometimes he did not. The heroine. . . .

What had Deirdre, once Deirdre Rose, learned about her during those seven years?

She had learned that a woman, barred from love, is barred from life. She had learned that the world and all that therein is, cannot weigh down the scales for a moment, against a feather from Love's wings. She had learned that many women were placed in different ways, much as she was, and that there were only two courses possible for them to brace the mind and set the heart against all that heart craved for, to sit at the banquet of life, fed on strange foods and fruits that satisfied not, and sickening for one drop of water, one crumb of common bread. . . .

Or . . .

But, for the Celt, the maiden reared in Ireland, land of pure souls and bodies, there was no "or."

Again and again on her wanderings, Deirdre had met with love.

At the first intoxication of her freedom, when she had realized her small fortune, and determinedly broken loose from all remonstrance or control, she had scorned to call herself anything but what, in law, she was—a wife separated from her husband. She had kept her own name, and called herself simply "Mrs. Rose."

But in the hotels of the Continent, where, under the kindly chaperonage of Cook, her first fury of travel expended itself, she had learned just how most men regard a girlish, pretty creature, known as a separated wife. If the mill-owners of Belfast had paid little attention to the dreamy girl who paid so little to them, so did not the Latin races take Deirdre Rose. She had had to leave a Marseilles pension, where a retired colonel of the French Army got into the lift with her every time she went up or downstairs, and coolly tried to kiss her, with the entire approval of the lift-boy, who could not see what the young lady—without doubt an actress—was making a fuss about. She had drifted to Spain, drawn by the romance of mantillas, toreadors, bull-fights, and cachuchas. In Spain, she hired a duenna, and thought that all was well. But the duenna had to go to Mass, and while Deirdre was taking a quiet Sunday morning in the lounge, a young Spaniard of entirely gentlemanly manners, whom she had not previously met, came up to her, and asked her for lessons in English. She said she did not teach English, or anything else. He, not at all abashed, suggested she should, at the least, teach him the verb "to love." Deirdre retired indignantly to her room, and once safely behind locked doors, cried. It was clear that the pose of a separated wife would not do.

She called herself a widow. She did not like lying, but something had to be done; and besides, it was three years now, and the inquiry firm she employed to send her any news of Rogers had never sent anything but bills. She often told herself he must be dead. He had vanished from the Dublin Royal University, and the earth, it seemed, some time dur-

ing the week of that "student marriage." It was not much of a lie. . . .

As a widow named Rose, she received two proposals in three months, and the unpleasant atmosphere that had clung about her like a miasma, when she was known as a separated—possibly divorced—young wife, cleared almost altogether away. Then she met the inevitable somebody—feminine—who has always known oneself and one's people. It happened in Constantinople, where one might have been sure. . . .

The feminine somebody asked loud questions, in public, about Deirdre's husband. What member of the Rose family was he? The friend could not remember anyone. . . . When had he died? . . .

Years afterwards, innocent Deirdre used to blush to the tips of her ears when she remembered that scene.

It became clear that the name must go. After all, she was legally Mrs. Rogers. She would use her married name. And, in order to suggest some good broken-hearted sort of reason for refusal to re-marry, she would wear mourning—all the time. It would be made very becoming—black had always suited her.

Now for a time there was something like peace, and Deirdre, beginning to feel the first promptings of the talent that was to make her known; dreaming, to some purpose now, over her little wander-songs and the music that she wedded so cunningly to them, stayed for a while in lovely Orotava, gem of Teneriffe—the spot that caused old Humboldt to fall upon his knees and thank God, when first he saw its beauty.

The hotel was full of English; she made a few

friends among them, and thought them safer than the volcanic Spaniards, from whom, after her Madrid experiences, she kept carefully away.

There she met Adrian Shaw. This is not the history of Adrian Shaw, nor of Deirdre's relations with him. He takes place in her story—the story of her long wanderings—only because of what he found out for her.

They had fallen in love with each other. For the first time, Deirdre—twenty-five now, and tired, it may be, of flying from the face of Love wherever and however he met her—stayed, and confronted facts. She had half loved before now. A woman, young, pretty, unsatisfied of heart, cannot see the men of three continents flit through her “moving shadow-show” without casting more than one look, once in a way. But this time it was Love, Love with wings, arrows and bow, and she, struck, could fly no longer.

You must remember that there was always hope. If Rogers was dead—as she was almost sure he must be—why, then, in three years more she would be free to remarry, provided she did not fear the risk of his possible, improbable return. One did not commit bigamy, after seven years.

This may have been in her mind—one thinks it was—when she put on the prettiest of her pretty black, gauzy frocks for Adrian Shaw. Deirdre had not visited Spain without learning, at the least, how to make black the most charming, the most alluring of colours; an art understood from end to end by that supreme coquette, the Spanish woman.

She knew, in these days, how to place a rose so that it should light like rouge; how to underline the beauty of neck and shoulder by the careless-careful

placing of a scarf; how to use her fan as a butterfly uses its feathery antennæ, and to show the tiny, Spanish-looking slipper beneath the flowing skirt, just so much as a *señorita* shows it. Unconsciously, she had used these arts, up to the days in Orotava; then she put forth, with full consciousness, every resource of body and of mind. She meant to fascinate Adrian Shaw. She liked him; she thought she could do more than like him, if—

The "if" was answered, with a vengeance. Shaw, a London barrister on a holiday, with an actor's handsome face, and an athlete's fine figure, answered her lure as a bird answers the bird-catcher's whistle; and Deirdre, not without a prick of disappointment, realized one more truth—that this was, must be the way most women got their husbands. In novels, it was always the man who began. Perhaps there were no men anywhere in the world who did the beginning—all the beginning—themselves. Except, of course, terrible people like the Spaniard who wanted to learn English. . . .

In the midst of her reflections, syllogisms, conclusions, Adrian Shaw swept down like a storm unchained by a spell, and made such love to her, honest love that shamed no one, yet hot love that meant to have its way, that she ceased to think and draw conclusions of any kind. She told him the truth about herself—not without uneasiness, for surely it was a good deal to ask of any man, that he should believe her version of the thing, just as it had happened.

Shaw was—as he did not tell her—the shining light of divorce practice at that time in London. No member of the shrewd profession to which he belonged was better equipped with the special

knowledge that enabled him to judge unerringly as to the truth of Deirdre's tale. He summed the matter up, privately, in a sentence: "Man a fool or a crank, girl straight as they make 'em." To Deirdre herself, his summing was as follows:

"Your inquiry agent is either a useless ass—most of them are—or in Rogers' pay. Something should have been found out long ago. As for your relations, they ought to be hanged. I'll go to Dublin myself."

He went, and took with him a French detective who had done work of other kinds for him, and to whom this trifling little mystery of Deirdre's would be, he expected, clear as glass. Deirdre stayed in the golden vale of Orotava, among the grapes and oranges and dragon trees, with the noble Peak of Teneriffe, crowned by its pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night, brooding over her and promising, like the fire and the cloud that went before Moses, to show her the way into the Canaan of her dreams.

Shaw came back.

She met him down in the port of Santa Cruz. She had not been able to wait in Orotava—one could save a day by going down to the coast, and meeting the steamer on its arrival. He walked with her up to Camacho's; that trained lawyer face of his, in the midst of the staring crowds, kept its secrets to itself. Yet somehow—she knew.

They sat under the dragon tree in the garden, while waiters ran backwards and forwards carrying trays, and folk from the steamer went about looking for unoccupied tables. They were not within ear-shot of the other couples who were flirting, love-making, planning, within a few yards, but it was

bitter to Deirdre to learn her fate—as she felt, in that moment, most women had to learn it—before the eyes of the world. She did not need to hear what Adrian had to say; by what he did not say, she knew.

He told her that he had disentangled the whole skein, and that the disentangling should have been—could have been—done long before. Her inquiry agent was a man of straw, who never worked for any client, so far as Shaw could ascertain, but lived upon blackmail and lies. His Frenchman had done the work in a couple of days.

Rogers was alive. He was in a lunatic asylum. He had been there ever since a fortnight after the wedding.

“But—” said Deirdre, speaking for the first time (how strange the yellow Canarian sunlight looked, falling on the flagstones of the path—it seemed to have changed, mysteriously, in the last few minutes, and the commonplace people eating ices and drinking tea looked like fantasies on a Chinese screen)—“But—”

Shaw answered her, without letting her go on. He looked much as usual, only that his eyes had a sleepless expression about the rims, and his mouth had—surely—grown narrower and sharper.

“I thought of that at once. It’s no good. He was as sane as I am at the time—or if he wasn’t, there is no possible proof to the contrary. He was coaching third year Arts men up to the day he went off, and some of them took brilliant degrees. The lecturers who saw his notebooks said they were the ablest summing up of—anyhow, I read them myself, and I don’t think I could have done better. It seems he took a week’s holiday just after he married you,

and went down into Wicklow for some fishing. I can guess why he did it; the same quixotic impulse that made him 'set you free' as he called it. Good God! Set you free! . . . Well, he went on from Wicklow to Cork, where he had relations; stayed with them for a day or two, and then, without any warning, suddenly and violently went off his head, and had to be put under restraint at once."

"Did you see the—the—"

"The doctor? I did. He wouldn't let me see the patient; said it would excite him too much; bad case, practically hopeless. I put the matter to him, in a general sort of way. He said—I won't trouble you with the medical details—that Rogers had been undoubtedly sane up to the day he went off his head; rather an uncommon, but not an unheard of case. I believe, as a matter of fact, that he met something like it before. . . . Well, I tried to make the wretched old beggar see reason—for if he'd only backed me up, there might have been a chance. He wouldn't. Said he had not a doubt Rogers was accountable for his actions at the time—thought more of his medical reputation, and the interest of having a curious case, than of anything or anyone else. . . . I went back to the relations then. Thought I might get them to admit something useful. Would they, damn them!—Sorry, Deirdre; I couldn't help it. But they were damnable. They wouldn't admit anything. You see, if the trouble was what the doctor said, it was the kind of thing that isn't in your family, but if it was what I wanted them to say, they'd have had to blacken themselves. I saw pretty soon that was no use. I wish I'd had one or two of them in the witness box with myself briefed for the opposite side. I'd have given them gip, I would so . . ."

Deirdre was beginning to feel as if she had had about all she could stand. The feeling is never true; we can always stand a little more of it, whatever it is, and generally have to—but she was too young in misfortune's school to have learned so much. She felt that Shaw was talking on, simply because he did not dare to stop; that he could not say, in so many words, what both of them knew to be true. As long as it was not said, there seemed, somehow, to be hope.

In such moments, the woman is often the braver. Deirdre was first to rush upon the spears. She broke without ceremony into her lover's speech.

"Then there's no hope," she said, and wondered how she could say it. But it seemed quite easy. People in plays and stories choked and gasped and staggered away into the night. She and Adrian Shaw sat on the bench beneath Camacho's dragon tree, among the tea-drinking people, and ended their love, as one ends a piece that is played. One lifts one's hands from the keys, the music stops. That is all.

"He might always die," said Shaw.

"He won't," she answered. "I couldn't wish him to, Adrian. The world's a good place, in spite of everything. I can't grudge him his little share of it. You know, he meant to be very kind."

"How much did you see of him?" asked Shaw.

"I met him a few times. We went to the same debating society; he used to speak, and I did, sometimes. And he lent me books. . . . It was a kind of dream; the sort of thing a young girl with an overdeveloped brain feeds on, and thinks so spiritual. One broadens, one understands better, as life goes on." It was she who was talking to gain

time now. She felt, with a cold chloroformed kind of pain, that this was the last of their talks—they would never talk again. . . .

Neither could find anything to say after that. It was all, she thought, amazingly unlike the things in plays. He ought to have asked her to be "his wife in the sight of Heaven," and she ought to have refused in a beautiful speech, tears in her voice—and then should have come the "staggering away." . . . How astonished, amused, delighted, the tea-drinking people would have been! Why could she find nothing— Oh—he was speaking.

"Well?" He got up from the seat. "Well, have we got to say it?" It was hardly a question. It seemed that Shaw—unlike the typical "hero"—knew enough not to make a fool of himself. Yet there was a hint of something hopeful in the voice, not contained in the words. A suggestion of force withheld; floods that might be unloosed—if she chose. Perhaps no man, in such a case, feels utterly hopeless.

He waited. The yellow sunlight of Santa Cruz filtered through dragon-tree boughs, lay in gold, round, unfocussed spots at his feet. There was a Spanish woman singing in an upstairs drawing room. Her voice was nasal and hard, but it rose joyously over its own defects; it was soaked in gold sunlight, in nights of love and stars.

Deirdre heard it, and suddenly, like the bursting of a shell, pain burst over her at last. That was what she was giving up—for ever. She had to go on living, without that.

There was no question in her mind; perhaps Shaw had known from the first, in spite of his starveling hope, that there would not be. A divorce court

lawyer lives near enough to the Tree of Life to know good and evil without guessing about it.

Nor was there thought, or hope, of delay. The thing had happened; that was all.

Deirdre rose to her feet, and stood beside Adrian Shaw. The pain was getting very bad.

"Oh, must you go?" was what she said, in a "society" tone of voice. She could not have said anything else, if the jewel-blue skies of Santa Cruz had been bound to fall on her as penalty for failure.

Shaw understood. He was swearing violently to himself, cursing the Rogers family, the doctor, Rogers himself, Deirdre for her past folly, and present virtue, himself for getting caught in such a coil. Yet all the while another side of his mind kept whispering evenly, "It's best; you know you couldn't have held your own and got on, tied to a 'pretty housekeeper.' She's right. Yes, hang her, she's right," the other side of his mind allowed at the end of a few interminable seconds.

"Yes, I'm sorry, I must; got an engagement," was his answer which deceived no one, but covered an awkward gap. "May I ask your plans—going on to Las Palmas?"

"Yes, tonight. The boat you came by will just suit." She felt, now, she must get away—away.

"Then—good-bye." They were in the hall of the hotel. Shaw did not look to see if anyone were in sight or not. He took her up, kissed her, and walked out.

And Deirdre went to her room, sat on the bed, and said, in the inevitable phrase that has borne so much of the world's sorrow, "Oh, my God!"

The Elder Dempster boat sailed six hours later. Shaw did not see her off; did not see her, ever, again.

She was conscious of a small astonished pricking of annoyance when she saw, two months later, in a London magazine, the notice of his wedding.

She did not get over it herself for quite six months. During that time she wrote the little, sad-sweet song of separated lovers, known to all singers as "Your Shadow On My Heart."

In time, the picture of Adrian Shaw grew dim, but the mark that he had left on her life remained. She knew, now, just what she was condemned to.

"Well," she said, "if I have got to bear something, so has everyone else; and there's always 'the wind on the heath, brother.' I'll live for that, and as for human beings, not one of them shall lay hold on me again."

From South America, from Panama—then a fever-eaten, burned-out isthmus, little travelled—she drifted. She drifted to Easter Islands; to the Marquesas, eastward to the Gilberts, southward and westward again, by Australia and New Zealand, to Tahiti. There, because she felt the urge of music increase in her, she paused a little, shut herself in her room at the hotel, and wrote much of the day, coming out at times to play for a quiet hour on the piano—songs written and to be written, fragments, interpretations.

And there the tourist party found her, on the night of the boat's coming in.

She sat in her room, and listened to their talk, after she had slipped away. A word or two about the islands of the far Western Pacific, where she had never been, caught her attention. It seemed that one of the travellers had spent some months in the Solomons, going on to the New Cumberland group. The others thought him quite a hero on that account.

"I suppose they are dangerous places," the man was saying. "Anyhow, whether things happen or not, they always might. But there is a fascination in Melanesia."

"What is it?"

"If I could tell you! Those islands are brandy—absinthe rather, the liquor of fierce dreams. This Tahiti is honey. Mead, perhaps—she intoxicates you, too, does Tahiti, gently—sweetly. But the Cumberlands—ah, the Cumberlands! They're like a wicked, beautiful, black and scarlet sunset, the kind that goes before an earthquake or a typhoon."

"They seem to be like a lot of things."

"Most of all like themselves; that's where it is. They would inspire a dead man. I shall go and look at them again some day."

"Oh, no, you won't; your bride won't let you." It was an open secret that the traveller was going home to be married.

"Well—brides and Melanesia don't agree. I'll have to jilt her." There was laughing.

The people left next day, and Deirdre never even saw the man who had cast out this chance seed of thought. But, thenceforward, the picture of the New Cumberlands, far away at the end of the Pacific, at the end of all things known, followed her even into dreams. She began to long for those fierce draughts that the traveller had spoken of; to sicken, as she had been sickening, already, without knowing it, of Tahiti mead and nectar. Dim wraiths of songs floated through her mind—verses and melodies unbodied, yet wonderful. She thought that she might grasp them in that strange, seldom-travelled world. And the few last words that the traveller had dropped—"Brides and Melanesia don't agree"—

had an attractive, sweet-bitter sound to her. Love, it seemed, was not the spirit of the New Cumberlands. It was all too plainly the spirit of Tahiti. She had had enough of that. She would go.

So, across the seas and across the world, the wavering, uncertain track of Deirdre's wanderings began at last to sense, far off, its ultimate goal.

CHAPTER IV

DEIRDRE, the wanderer, sat in her deck chair, and saw the New Cumberlands draw near.

She was the only woman on board. It happens so, often, on the little worn-out boats that ply through far, lonely Western Pacific groups. The Solomons, the New Cumberlands, the great outer islands linking on to New Guinea—New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville and Buka—are not attractive to travellers for pleasure. Even to-day, they are peopled by dangerous savages, have little or no hotel accommodation, and own an ill reputation for fevers. Women travellers on the Western boats are missionaries, or traders' wives, almost invariably; and few in number at any time.

It was a novelty to the captain and officers of the island steamship "Tyre" to carry a young and pretty woman, travelling apparently for pleasure. ("Though indeed," as the mate said, "people who would go to the Western groups for pleasure would go to hell for fun.") Off watch, there was always one of the white-clad, gold-buttoned sailormen ready to restrain the rebellious hind-legs of Deirdre's chair, find books and magazines for her, and tell her interesting stories about the islands, very often true. They did not know that she was "Deirdre," the writer of love-songs and wander-songs—though the second mate had "Gypsy Lover"

in his bunk, and the chief engineer hummed "Your Shadow On My Heart," very flat, while he sat in his cabin figuring out how much coal he ought to burn back to Sydney, against how little he was going to be allowed. They only knew that she was a very nice looking young woman, more or less in mourning for somebody, and that her name on the passenger list was "Mary D. Rogers." Deirdre owned Mary as a first name; she had found it a useful incognito at times. She did not want to be bored with talk about her songs, as a general rule, and the appearance of her name in full on any passenger list, or hotel register, meant discovery. In those early days of the century, Deirdre was a name so uncommon as to be almost unheard of, Gladyses, Marjories and Violets being all the mode.

Mary D. Rogers, therefore, called Miss Rogers by the ship's people, in the absence of any statement to the contrary, came up to the New Cumberlands unknown. From the captain, mates, and engineer, she had heard enough about the place to frighten anyone not possessed of steady nerves. Fortunately, she was not nervous, and listened with calm interest to accounts of native murders, poisoned arrow shootings, free and undisturbed rifle firing across the harbour and the main roads of the islands, by natives who could not be called to account at the hands of the law, since no protectorate or annexation, and consequently no laws, existed. She heard other things that interested her more; of active volcanoes that one could ascend in a morning, of amazing native temples full of carvings, skulls, and mummies; of avenues of idols, and heathen "wishing arches," black women who crawled on hands and knees past any man; towns where a woman who

walked on one of the men's special roads was instantly clubbed and hurried to the cooking pot. . . .

She sat on deck, as the boat edged through the reefs, and made up her mind that she was going to like the New Cumberlands. Meliasi, the ridiculous townlet on the mainland, did not interest her very much, but the curious island residences did. Almost every one of the high, peaky islands dotting the huge harbour carried its tin-roofed bungalow, set on the extreme top with a winding path to lead up to it. She began to believe some of the wild tales she had heard about the Cumberlands. There was an unmistakable air of fortification about these high, withdrawn residences, set safely in the midst of shark-infested sea, high above gunshot from the mainland bush.

She was to stay at the Mission island, if they would take her in—and the captain had no doubt they would. He was anxious to get her landed, shed the mails, and go. The Meliasi cargo could be lightered off in a couple of hours, and if the "Tyre" could be got away before sundown, it was a clear gain of a day. One did not take one's ship out of unbuoyed, unlighted Meliasi in the dark, if one valued the continued possession of a master's "ticket."

Deirdre travelled light; her luggage was soon out. The second mate looked at it perplexedly.

"Honest to God," he said, "I don't see how we can spare a boat to go right over to Waka Island—Wawaka, I mean; the names of these islands are enough to break a chart-maker's heart; Waka, Wawaka, Wawa, Wakwak, Wakaka—some meaning in it to the nigs, I suppose. . . . You see, the old man's death on getting off before sundown, and

it'll take best part of two hours to pull there and back, and we want every boat we have to get out the cargo in. Would you very much mind if we sent you over in a canoe? I can get you a good local boy, and a fine canoe, safer than a boat any day, only you can't shift much cargo in them."

"Which is Waka?" asked Deirdre, looking out at the tangle of green and blue, peaky islets, all so much alike. "The farthest?"

"Oh, no. Two from the last. You can't quite see it here, Wakaka hides it. That's Wawa you're looking at, just peeping round Wakwak—"

"Oh, don't—you make me giddy," laughed Deirdre.

"And that one's the pearlers' island—oh, my aunt! Don't they have gay times in there! Fursey, the piratical chap I told you about, is the head and front of them; there's no divilment they aren't up to when they've got a cargo of whisky on board. I reckon there'll be a hot time in the old town to-night; we've got a lot of cases for them. It's a good island, better than the Mission one. You'll know the Mission island easy by the rows of native teachers' houses they have on the far side. They'll take every care of you, and delighted to have a visitor—'tisin't often they get the chance. Sure you don't mind the canoe? We're not quite the P. and O. or the Cunard up here, you know."

"Not in the least. Is that the canoe?"

"Yes. We're dropping an island boy here; good chap, well trained and can paddle like winking; they all can. He'll run you ashore in no time, and you can give him a bob if you like. I'm awfully sorry to rush you so, but the old man— Yes, sir, immediately. Yes, I'm seeing to it now. Quite all right,

sir.—Hold on tight down the ladder; let me give you my hand. All right?"

"All right."

"Good-bye till we come back; I'll look you up then. Have a good time. Yes, sir. Coming now."

It seemed as if the ship, lying tall and black and red upon blue water, slipped away from the canoe, rather than the canoe from the ship, so smoothly did they go. Deirdre, perched upon a narrow cross-seat, with her trunk before her, felt the light movement and the flight of cooler air, delightful. The day had been a very busy one; every "last day" of a voyage is. She knew, suddenly, that she was very tired. Well, it would not take an hour to get to the Mission, and she would be all right there. The Mission headquarters in Sydney had guaranteed that. There was always someone in charge, they had always room, and were delighted to see, at any time, a visitor like her. She could not possibly stay anywhere else at Meliasi; both Commissioners were bachelors, the "hotel" impossible, and the private houses not at all desirable.

"I'll get them to take the cost of my board," thought Deirdre, to the pleasant swish-swash of the paddle. "I do hate sponging. . . ."

She pulled the trunk behind her, leaned up against it, and half closed her eyes. She was really very tired. Not sleeping, yet not quite waking, she saw as in a dream the panorama of Meliasi harbour unfold; island stand up behind island, black mainland peaks peer out. She knew, now, what the traveller had meant when he spoke of the New Cumberlands as wicked looking. It did not need the lurid tales she had been told, nor even the sight of a war-canoe full of armed and feathered natives,

passing diagonally a hundred yards ahead, to convince her this was no longer the South Sea Island world as she had known it. If Tahiti and the Tubuais and the Gilberts were a dream, Meliasi was a nightmare. A picturesque and fascinating nightmare, but a nightmare all the same. There was the heavy heat, the brooding, sinister air of evil dreams; those black and purple hills upon the mainland, uninhabited by man, seemed as if they might well be the home of malicious goblin things. There was a new scent upon the air, one she had never smelled before. How many she recalled in other places: Tahiti was cocoanut oil and tiéré flower; Vavau was oranges and fish; New Zealand, fern trees wet with rainbow showers; Santa Cruz de Teneriffe—she had not thought of that for long—how long?—was Gran Canaria cigars, wine-shops and dust. . . . This, at the utmost ends of earth, *smelt* of the end of the world. Deirdre did not know how, but it was so. The wild, strange odour of forest gums and spices, of torrent-soaked trees, of acrid bush fruits, rotting under their leaves, that touched her nostrils lightly at times, as the breeze veered and shifted, was the scent—she knew—of the very back of beyond. And she was in it.

Was she awake or was she not? Black hands—black hands of this black country—holding her fast, closing round her heart. The voice of this black country, wicked and black, calling her, insistently and low. Something that said to her—“This is the end; there is nothing farther away; here you can look over the edge of the world, and down into strange gulfs that you never knew existed—save in nightmares. You did not believe the nightmares, but they were true. Every dream is true of some-

where; the Cumberlands are the land of the strange, glowing, evil dream."

"Why have I come?" she thought she said—was it to herself, or to the spirit of Meliasi? "What did I think to find?" She did not remember that she had thought to find nothing, rather, to lose something she had already found. She was in that trance-like, half-sleeping state that is above all others the state of second-sight.

"What shall I find?" she thought again, forming the words with her lips, and seeing, through half-closed eyes, the harbour and the hills all red with sunset, and the Mission island rising close at hand, she knew there would be an answer. It came; but there were no words. It was a feeling of something great; of something terrible, of a splendour beyond all speech, and a fear that tore. . . .

The dream—trance—call it what one will—broke.

"Goodness, I've been just about asleep," she thought, sitting up and looking about her. The sun was all but down; dark ready to stride out. A space of water in front of the canoe, black-crimson in the sunset, was bounded by a narrow beach and a boat-jetty. She judged them to be half a mile away.

"It will be dark by the time we get there," she thought, looking at the last spark of the sun as it dipped behind the sea-line of the harbour mouth. It grew dusk almost as she formed the words; never, in southern latitudes, had she seen light die away so quick. She felt suddenly, unpleasantly alone; the silent native who had paddled her was scarcely a human being, as one ranked the brown people of farther east and south; the beach of the Mission

island was deserted. She could not see the native teachers' houses, but she remembered, now, that they were at the other side of the hill. She had called out the name of the place—Wawa—to the native, as they paddled away from the ship's side, and he had nodded, and repeated it after her. Now he suddenly shifted on the bamboo perch he used for a seat, and spoke, for the first time since the start.

"Wawa!" he shouted, pointing with his paddle.

Deirdre showed him a shilling. The native, with a bark that seemed meant to express pleasure, swung to his paddle again, and made the canoe fly through the water. They were up to the beach in a quarter of an hour. Nevertheless, when the keel ground into clinking coral shale, it was dark, save for a faint reflection of red from water and sky, and Deirdre could see nothing but an ivory-pale line of beach, and a black wall of trees behind.

"Oh, look here," she remonstrated, "this won't do; take me to the other side; I can't land here. I don't know the way."

The native answered her in a flood of New Cumberlandese.

She pointed to the sea, and made signs with her hands, to express going round. The savage, however, without taking any notice, pulled his canoe up on the beach, slung out her trunk, dumped herself after it with one powerful swing of his arms, and fairly snatched the shilling from her hand.

"Wawa!" he shouted in a tone that was evidently meant to convey, "I've put you ashore where I said I would, and I'm hanged if I'll do any more."

"But—here—come back!" cried Deirdre. She did not like this at all.

The native never even turned his head. A black

shadow among shadows red and black, he glided from the beach, and was melted into dusk.

"Beast," said Deirdre to herself unemotionally—it did not seem to matter very much after all. "Now all I can do is to wait for the moon." She sat on her trunk, and waited. She knew the moon was due in half an hour.

It came, a bright silver segment rising through trees as a bubble rises through water, and showed her what she had been waiting for—a track. She had known there must be one, since there was a jetty.

"The trunk must wait," she said, dragging it into the shelter of the bush. "Some of the Mission boys can get it, later. There must be lots of them, if this track is a sample of the way things are done."

For the track was really astonishing—a flight of solid concrete steps, leading up and up by evenly graduated slopes to some invisible goal on the top of the island. In the waxing moonlight, flowers became visible, planted along the sides—scarlet-belled lilies, tuberose, alamanda, cannas striped with gold. There were concrete seats on the way, canopied over with trellises of flowers. Somewhere about half-way up, a little stream had been trained to cross the path, and to fall, in passing, through a pipe of hollowed stone, tempting the wayfarer to stoop his mouth and drink.

"For a little mission house at the end of the world, they seem to do themselves well," thought Deirdre.

She mounted up and up, and so did the moon, making of Meliasi harbour an onyx floor, set with stripes of silver. The islands near at hand were in shadow, great peaks that cut triangles out of the

stars, on one or two faint lights were showing. Deirdre wondered which of them might be the infamous pearlers' island of which she had heard on the voyage; the island where a gang of beach-combers lived, richly and sensually, on the proceeds of pearls obtained by native divers who were practically enslaved, and whose lives to their cruel masters were counted scarce worth the value of one single pearl. It was the shell known commonly as "lapi-lapi," they had told her; one got magnificent pearls at times out of it, but the shell itself was worth next to nothing; so you had to drive your niggers to get profits. . . .

An ugly story, that, of the hospital nurse who had come up to Meliasi some year or two past, to look after the wife of a wealthy planter in her confinement. The nurse was young and pretty, and somewhat flighty. After her case was out of hands, she had gone picnicking in a sloop owned by Fursey, chief of the pearling crowd. She had not come back to Meliasi. . . . There had been a terrible scandal. Nobody on the "Tyre" seemed inclined to tell the story; they only hinted. One thing was clear, that the nurse had gone down to Sydney by the next boat, and disappeared after. It was also said that a French planter—supposed to be the employer of the nurse—but even that seemed uncertain—had called out Fursey and put a bullet through him. Fursey, apparently, had not been killed, or even very badly hurt, since he figured in one or two other lurid tales of later date. . . .

Up and up and up. . . . This Mission island was certainly bigger, and higher, than she had fancied it to be when pointed out by the mate. But she was nearing the summit now; she could see more stars

every minute, and the wind, shut off during that long ascent, had begun to blow again, wild and strong and smelling of forests and sea.

The house at last!

One came upon it suddenly, round a sort of cliff corner. It stood on a small, artificially levelled flat, covering almost the whole summit of the island. It was large, astonishingly so for such a God-forsaken spot as the New Cumberlands—built of the same solid concrete that composed the steps; terraced all round, and presenting a blank face of pilastered concrete to the arriving guest, with just one opening in the middle, an archway that seemed to lead into a Spanish-style inner court or patio.

Deirdre was on familiar ground now; she knew instinctively just what she must find inside—a paved yard, with cloistered galleries surrounding it; a fountain in the centre, trellises, beds, tubs of flowers and flowering trees. And it was so.

She walked in under the archway. There was not a sound; the place seemed uninhabited. Yet it could not be, for there was a huge oil lamp swinging on a chain stretched across the court, and it was lighted. That must have been done no more than an hour ago. Besides, she smelt wood smoke. Perhaps the family had gone out down to the boat, and left a native boy in charge.

Experience taught her where to look for the kitchen. She peered in. There was nobody at all in the neat, white-tiled little room; but a lamp was burning here too, the stove was alight, and a large covered saucepan, simmering over carefully stacked billets, sent forth a pleasant smell.

"They are expected immediately," she thought. "If the rest of the house is up to sample, I am in

for a pretty good time. I think I ought to turn New Cumberland missionary myself."

Outside, on the windy platform, with the sea booming round the base of the island a long way below, she stood and listened. She thought—was almost sure—she heard the rattle of oars in rowlocks somewhere near the point where the jetty must lie. The overhang of the island hid the landing-place, however, and she had to be content with guessing.

There was no use staying outside, when she had really arrived at last. The Mission people would be back in no time, and she would present her letter, and would no doubt be pleasantly received. In the meantime, as the weather looked to be on the change, and great, rainy clouds were sweeping over the moon, the thing to do was to get indoors.

Within, she met with a check. There were no lamps lighted, except the big one in the courtyard, and she could not find a match anywhere. Impossible to distinguish one room from the other, impossible to do anything but sink into a dimly seen chair, make the best of things, and wait. She knew how it was in the islands on steamer day. She ought to know. . . .

Deirdre sat straight up in her chair, her hands pressing hard on the thick silk cushions. She knew that she had been sleeping; not very long, was it? It did not feel long, but it must have been longer, and she must have been sleepier, than she thought, for the missionaries had come back. She could hear them, now, in the outer room—(She was in an inner room, bedroom or sitting room, she did not know which)—talking and laughing, very loudly, and pulling chairs about. The outer room was lighted;

she could see a vivid oblong of orange falling on the flagstones of the corridor, some way off. Dinner seemed just starting; plates were being rattled, and the smell of good things made her feel desperately hungry.

Yet she delayed—with her hands pressing on the arms of the chair, and her body leaning forward—ready to rise and join the party in the dining room; with the civil speeches she had composed trembling on her lips, and the letter from the Mission headquarters lying in the pocket of her serge travelling skirt. Something kept her back—shyness, uncertainty, she did not know what. It seemed as if she were petrified.

Then happened something that petrified her in good earnest. Only a word—a word sharply rapped out by someone in the dining room, on the crash of a breaking glass. But it was a word that one could not, by any possibility, hear in a missionary house.

Deirdre sat and listened, her mouth fallen open, her breath coming quick. She could not have moved, now, had the roof been collapsing over her head.

The word was repeated, followed by a string of curses. Then someone with a hard clear voice like a bit of glass, said:

“Are you the ermine, that dies of a spot on its innocent fur?” There was a sort of drawl in the tone. You could tell that the owner of it had some whisky, but not too much. On the other hand, the man who had sworn was thick-voiced and almost stuttering.

A burst of laughter followed the clear-voiced man’s remark. It seemed to be thought very funny that the swearing man should be called innocent.

“Only a glass of burgundy, man, it’s not blood,”

chipped in a third speaker. "Haven't you got a laundress?"

This also was apparently thought to be humorous; there was another general laugh. And then—

"Has he got a laundress?" demanded someone else. ("More of them?" cried Deirdre's terrified soul). "Say, you fellows, has Fursey got a laundress? How many laundresses has little Fursey got?"

If Deirdre could have described her feelings in that moment, she would have said that it was as if she had swallowed a bomb, and the bomb had just exploded. Fursey! Good God! She had missed the Mission island, landed on the pearlers' island by some mistake—probably misapprehension of those puzzling native names—and was at that moment in the heart of the beachcombers' stronghold.

The tales she had been hearing on the steamer rushed through her mind in a torrent. She remembered that she was, for the first time in her life, beyond the help and the protection of the law. The New Cumberlands had none. There was no one to call Fursey and his crew to account if they choose to hold her captive, kill her, worse than kill her. They were evidently on the verge of a drinking bout—one of those orgies the mate had spoken of. When once they were crazed with spirits. . . .

In books, the persecuted heroine always had a revolver or a dagger at hand, and usually threatened in a grand scene to kill herself or her persecutors. If not, there was always the hero; one relied on him to turn up at the right moment.

But Deirdre had no weapon, and no hero. What was she to do? Escape? She remembered that she

had come to the room in which she was sitting through that outer one that was now lit up for the diners. No way out there. This Spanish patio style of building might be romantic, but it was likely to prove an ill happening for her that Fursey had fancied it for his home. Such a building is entered, for the most part, by one door only, the door opening on the patio; all other doors give access to the patio itself, but not to the outer world. It seemed to her that the dining room, from its situation, must be next the patio archway, and if that was so, she had not a dog's chance of getting out.

What then? What did women in like case do? What had they done, for hundreds—thousands—of years? This was not the twentieth century as far as she was concerned; it was the dawn of history, with Goths and Huns unchecked by religion or by law, raiding as they would. She had to depend on herself, and do as an Italian maiden would have done, in the sack of Rome. She would have to hide.

Where?

Deirdre, blood up now, and heart beating steadily—for she must not, she must not, lose her self-possession, or all was over—strained her eyes to see through the dusk, and make some guess as to where she was. These were the times before cheap power plants made electric lighting easy; before acetylene and air gas were used in far colonial possessions. Big, blazing kerosene lamps, that heated all the room, were the only way of lighting. It followed that one did not light these hot, wasteful lamps unless obliged to do so. Only the dining room in all the house was lighted; the far side of the patio, as Deirdre saw it from a pale window opening, was in deep shadow; the room that doubtless opened out

of the one she was sitting in must be unlighted too. A sudden dart of fear shot through her. This big, high-ceilinged apartment, next the dining room, must be a drawing room of some kind, and it, too, must have its communicating door, after the fashion of tropic houses. The men, when they had eaten and drunk, would doubtless move in to the larger and cooler room. If anything induced them to open the door—now—

She slipped to her feet as quietly as a cat, and began to feel along the farther wall. The door—the handle. Turn it very softly, close it behind, very softly indeed. What was this room? A bedroom; there was light enough to tell so much. One could not mistake the white tower of mosquito netting, and the gleam of gilded china set on marble. What was the long pale thing in a corner; it looked like a coffin covered with white. . . . Oh—a box ottoman. Lift the lid; feel inside. What a large one, and nothing in it, either, except a little box of smelly moth-balls. It seemed, by the feel, to have a deep valance all round its padded lid. Now if one wanted to hide in a place like that, one could slip the little box under the edge of the lid, hidden by the valance, and it would give one air.

She saw it all clearly. She would slip into the box, wait until the house was quiet, and then, when the pearling gang were sleeping their heavy drunken sleep, she would slip out again, and get away. If there was no canoe about the beach of the island, she would hide herself among the brushwood where she had hidden her trunk, and watch for a native paddling by. The Mission island could not be far away; she would arrive there early in the morning, and by mid-day this horrible experience would seem

like some wild nightmare fancy, born of the darkness, and swept away by dawn. If she only kept her head, and carried out her plan, she could be in no danger.

Not knowing how long she had slept that perilous sleep in the silken chair, she did not know, either, how long the men had been drinking, but she fancied it could not have been a very great while, for they were not violent. From the bedroom, she could hear popping of corks, clinking and occasional breaking of glasses, voices that rose loudly now and then, a song or two, but evidently Fursey's gang had not worked up to their best; it would probably be a long time before— What was that they were—someone was—singing? Oh—"Gypsy Lover." That was the worst of being a popular composer—to hear your most delicate fancies roared out by a drunken—but was he roaring? Was he drunk? It seemed not. The singer had a good voice, clear and true as a crystal bell; he sang well, and the refrain of the song, taken up by two or three voices in the crowd, went with an excellent swing. Someone did howl out the last, long-drawn note like a wolf seeking his prey; but another voice—she thought, the voice of the crystalline singer—called sharply, "Cut it, Fursey, that's too good to spoil," and the howl ceased.

Deirdre, crouching on the box like a cat ready to spring, half her brown-gold hair fallen down, her shoes off, her black skirt and white petticoat well tucked up for action, was a strange picture in the clearing moonlight, if she could have seen herself. She had almost forgotten where she was; the composer's ecstasy at the sound of those men's voices singing her song had fallen on her, and her small face glowed like a white lamp lit by inward flame. She

was excited beyond her own knowledge. It had been in all ways a trying and exciting day, ending with this mad adventure that was by no means over yet; the evening was furnace-hot, the scents of frangipanni, trumpet flower, male paw-paw, just outside the window, were like sensuous strains of music whispering in the night. Deirdre, young, fair, heart-starved now and ever, had but one outlet for the romance that flowed upward from the sunless caverns of her soul. In her songs, she said that which she could not say otherwise; she set free the love that had no earthly goal.

Tonight, crouched there upon the cushioned box, her fallen hair sparkling in the moonlight about her rapt pale face, there came to her what should have been the end of her most famous song—"Your Shadow On My Heart"—and was not.

"Oh, oh, if I had written it like that!" she breathed. The new strain was enchanting. She whispered it under her breath, to words that came somehow—anyhow—words did not matter very much after all—

"Your shadow on my heart. . . .

O Love, look up with me, and see at last,

When our long agony is overpast,

In rainbow rays the clouds afar shall roll,

Leaving your light, Love's light, the light of Heaven,

For ever in my soul!"

So, and so, and so, it should go. . . . She would publish a new edition. . . .

Down she came from her heights again, to realize her small cramped figure on the box, the heat and the fierce insistent scent of island flowers, the moon growing clear outside; inside from the dining room—

No—was it possible? The scraping of chairs on a polished floor—voices—footsteps—

Yes!

She swung herself off the box, heart beating like a frightened little rabbit's—for now she realized the danger of the position that she found herself in—dived head first into the refuge she had chosen, lay down as flat as she could, and propped the lid, under its shielding frill, with the little box of moth-balls.

It was terribly hot; in a moment she felt herself streaming like the black-skinned natives who shifted cargo in the holds of the steamer "Tyre." But there was air enough to breathe, and she did not think the box would cramp her badly, if she had not to stay all night in it—which chance might Heaven forbid, for how could one get safely out and away in daylight?

Footsteps, some of them unsteady and lurching, wandering about the rooms. Sounds of heavy bodies sinking down on chairs and lounges. A strong smell of cigars, drifting through the draughts of the propped box lid, afterwards: a smell of coffee. Talk like a roaring river, one voice indistinguishable from another. By and by, footsteps nearing the bedroom; pausing—coming in.

Deirdre in the darkness of the box, prayed hard, she hardly knew what. She heard two men enter the room. They seemed to have something to say to one another, about some other of the guests—

"Fursey—just like him—never asked—no one could stop him, when he's—"

"Oh, yes, it was better not to. Old Steve! a wily bird in his way, mind you. No unnecessary rows."

"Yes, but when anyone does get right across his hawser—"

"Grant you! You going home?"

"Reckon so. All my cargo to tally off tomorrow

morning early if I don't mean to let anyone else snaffle my trade. The nigs are down in dozens to buy."

"Did you get the extra cartridges off Steve?"

"He said I might take them and be damned to me."

"Then you won't have to pay?"

"Suppose the damn's the pay. Where did he say? Bedroom—box—Lord, the place is full of boxes."

"Oh," shrieked Deirdre's frightened little soul silently. "Oh, my God, don't let them look in this one." She drew herself together like a scared kitten, huddled at the bottom of the chest.

One of the men paused, it seemed, to light a cigar. She heard the scratch, smelt the smoke. The feet of the smoker seemed to be just beside her box.

"Which one was it?" asked a voice, with short pauses filled by puffs.

"Try the camphorwood." They seemed to try it, and drew a blank. "They might be in the chest of drawers." A sound of drawers pulled out. "Would they be here? No. What's that cushiony thing?"

Deirdre gritted her teeth together.

"That's not a box. One of them fancy sofa things. Flash place, isn't it?"

"My oath. Here's the cartridges. Did he say all?"

"I reckon he meant it. There's nothing mean about him, I will say that. You take one lot. Here, come along, they're going. We'll miss the boat."

Deirdre, breathing in short pants of relief, down at the bottom of her box, was conscious, nevertheless, of an odd sensation of disappointment. It seemed to her that the orgie of the pearling island

had fallen short of specification. She had, unconsciously, expected something like Nero's feast in "Quo Vadis." It would undoubtedly have been fun, whispered the adventure spirit in the girl, to have lain there safe and silent, and heard all the "goings-on." But they had been comparatively quiet on the whole; they had really not "gone on" at all. She wondered who the man could be who had sung her song so well. Whatever she had thought to carry away as memory from an "orgie" at Fursey's notorious home, it was not the recollection of her own delicate music, beautifully sung.

Well, all the better; Fursey would be going to sleep now—she hoped, not in that room—and when he was asleep would be her time. Yes, they were departing. She heard the clatter of hurricane lamps, voices in the verandah, rough laughter as someone staggered and fell; calls for "an arm to help a chap down these —— steps." Dogs barked furiously outside; there were calls for natives—"Bobo, you black swine!" "Here, Wala, give a hand and be damned to you!" Then, as the guests passed over the brow of the cliff, a sudden silence; only the soft pitter-patter of the palms outside the house, in the stream of the night-wind, and the faint, far hushing of the surf on the harbour reef.

She heard Fursey, by and by, come back alone. He walked lightly, yawning a little. In the dining room he moved about for a minute or two, putting out lights, and then came his nearing step, and the sudden glare of light through the valance, that showed he was coming in, lamp in hand.

The devil of adventure that lived in Deirdre prompted her, frightened as she was, to peer out through a tiny opening in the valance, and see what

manner of man this might be, who was the figure in countless tales of violence and evil, who terrorized the Cumberlands with his gang, flouted the British Commissioner, killed, stole, carried off helpless women to his eyrie, as an eagle carries its prey.

She received the shock of her life.

Fursey was tall, slight, well made and well dressed, with a refined, clean-shaven face, and the bearing of a gentleman. He had long, neat hands, artist hands. She saw his eyes, undershadowed by the lamp; they were handsome eyes, bright, and rather thoughtful. Could this truly be—

"Impossible," she thought. But the terrible stories came back into her mind. Fursey must be, of his kind, like certain bad, innocent-seeming women; a face that one could like and trust covering a soul that was rotten to the core. Deirdre had met such women, in her wanderings.

She resisted the impulse that prompted her to come out of hiding, apologize for her presence, and ask simply for a boat to take her on to the Mission. She crouched, hidden and waited.

The man set down the lamp, yawned, stretched, and disappeared into an adjoining room. It seemed to be a bathroom by the noise he made. By and by he passed through the bedroom again, in a suit of silk pajamas, blew out the lamp as he went by and vanished on to the verandah, where a sound of creaking and settling down proclaimed that he had gone to bed.

Deirdre had calculated on this, knowing that in the islands no one used bedrooms unless obliged by stormy weather. Now—or soon—was her time. She hoped that Fursey was a snorer.

He was not, but after half an hour or so of wait-

ing, hearing no sound, she thought it safe to try. Shoes tied to her belt, and skirt pinned up, she slipped out of the box, and lowered the lid soundlessly.

She had entered in the darkness; she went out in brilliant moon-shine. There was plenty of light now; clouds racing swiftly in some upper current of wind, obscured the face of the moon from time to time, but dark was gone. It was a wild, white, merry night; the adventurer in Deirdre, the part of her that had budded into those matchless gypsy songs, was all awake. She could not, for the life of her, have recaptured the mood that had, a little while ago, brought forth another verse to her chief love-song. Love and adventure are twins; she knew it, but one twin led the other, by far, in this merry moonlight.

"What next?" she asked herself, gliding shoeless down the steps of the verandah, and across the courtyard, where the alamanda swung gold censers to the moon, and croton tree like Moses' burning bush, crimson and yellow as flame. The hammered iron gateway was in shadow. She felt it; found the latch—lifted it—

Locked!

Round the cloisters of the patio she went, peering everywhere, searching in all corners. Room after room palely lighted by the moon, she looked into. Bedrooms handsomely furnished; sitting rooms, a billiard room, locked doors that might lead to anything, another iron grille at the back. All locked or doorless, save for doors that opened on the patio. She was a prisoner.

"So *that's* the next," she thought, coming back at last to the arched doorway by which she had first

gone in. "I might have known—in a place like the New Cumberlands. Oh, I wish I were not so hungry. I wonder, have they left anything in the dining room? No matter what becomes of me, I can't do any good by starving."

She found the dining room. There was food in plenty on the table. She ate, nor disdained the comfort of a glass of some rich Spanish wine, from a cut and gilded decanter. The world looked better afterwards.

"I shall get away all right in the morning," she thought, pocketing a few cakes and a tangerine orange or two, for possible emergencies.

It was best not to return to the box, she judged, since that room was more or less in use. One of the bedrooms on the other side of the patio had a large high bed. She might hide under that when she heard anyone coming, and for the rest of the time, sit on the floor behind the bed-head. The box was really too hot.

With her plunder in her pockets, she crossed the patio again, entered the empty room, and crouched down in a safe place on the floor. She did not feel sleepy now. She lay with her hands under her head, listening to the faint, weird noises of the night-owls wailing; fruit-bats squeaking among banana trees; the "pretty creature" of a wandering wagtail; the far-off hushing of the surf. Somewhere on the ceiling a ray of moonlight came and went, filtered through waving trees. She lay and watched it, and wondered. . . .

CHAPTER V

STEPHEN CONN, sober, though cheered with good wine, let out the last of his guests, and went slowly back to the house.

It had been a pleasant evening on the whole. Des Roseaux was always amusing and witty; the British Commissioner, though he did not talk much, listened excellently. Riley, the hotel keeper, knew how to behave himself when asked out to dinner. The planters and traders had, some of them, drunk too much, but no one had been rowdy. Fursey was the only jarring note. Of course, when he had come up at Meliasi jetty, drunk enough to be quarrelsome, and had demanded a lift to his island, Conn had given it, to avoid a scene before his guests. And when Fursey, growing more drunk, as the spirits mounted to his head in the cool night air, had landed with all the rest on Wawa, and accompanied them up to Conn's house as an invited guest, it had still seemed best to make no objection. He had been there before, though not often: not at all since the day when Conn had been told that the two shots fired at him from the bush were Fursey's. So far, Blackbury had not managed to get him deported; no man-of-war had called, and without the man-of-war, nothing could be done. It was best to keep the peace

until forced to break it. Conn knew that would probably happen; meantime, he would see as little as he could.

So Fursey, as one of the dinner guests, ate Conn's good food, and drank his wines, the best in the New Cumberlands. And he grew so rapidly helpless that, after all, he got very little in anybody's way. He had rather rudely interrupted Conn's rendering of a favourite song; well, that was another item in the score being run up against him. It would be paid some day. Conn paid debts. Meantime, it might be put aside.

A pleasant evening. Conn, at peace with the world, went into his handsome house, humming some little tune or other. He liked asking people up to that triumph of island splendour; he liked feeding them with rare dainties and good wines, and hearing them say, for the fortieth time, that no one had such fine cigars. Success was pleasant on his lips that night. And best of all was the thought he cherished—that his secret was his own. Not a soul in all the New Cumberlands knew what he got, or where he got it. A wise old man far away in Melbourne knew; a man with a face like pictures of the Doctors in the Temple, and a long majestic beard; a man who was rich, and growing richer, because of what Conn sent him down. How did he send it? That, too, was his secret. He laughed a little to himself, thinking of the persecutions, the bribes, the bullyings, the wheedlings, that the local post-master had undergone because of this unsolved mystery. While all the time. . . .

He yawned and went to bed.

Next day, in the ordinary course of things, he would have been over to Meliasi in his boat, seeing

to the disposal of the cargo that had come on the "Tyre." But the mail had brought him letters that demanded a quiet day. The cargo could wait. No one was likely to climb up to the summit of Wawa that morning, or that afternoon. His guests of the previous night would most of them be feeling the effects of his lavish entertainment. As for the pearl-ing crowd from Fursey's, he rather imagined they had had a spree that would keep them quiet for the day. He had seen the cases of whisky coming off the "Tyre."

Fursey! What a brute the fellow was, and how determined to get himself, Steve Conn, in some way or other! Conn did not undervalue his enemy, for all that the enmity was not open. As he moved about his house that sunny, windy morning, a cigar between his lips, peace and an almost boyish pleasure in the possession of all these fine things filling his heart, he thought now and then of Fursey, the speck in the fruit, the drop of bitter in the cup. Fursey was certainly on his mind today.

What Fursey would have given to be in the locked-up enclosure that morning, to see what was going to be done! Conn had shut out the houseboys; he took no chances. It was ten o'clock now, growing hot, but the trade-wind kept on its job, and rattled gaily among the palm leaves of the patio, flinging about the spray of the fountain that was the only one in the whole Western Pacific, and the joy of its owner's heart. He crossed the patio to the far side, where the untenanted bedrooms were, and went down the long concreted pavement, sighing just a little, on this fair south-east-wind morning, for something softer, gentler, than himself to tread those corridors, flit in and out of those rich empty rooms;

rustle white dresses up and down the steps of the fountain. . . .

The black woman or the white "left-over"—that was a man's choice in the islands; and a poor choice it was. Lean, elderly maids, with nervous manners, came to the Mission sometimes, stayed a year or two, married a missionary, maybe, maybe went away unwed. They were no mates for Conn. Planters' wives, now and again, brought up an unmarried sister to keep house and drudge with children; a sister, usually, who could not be "got off." They tried to get her "off" through the medium of Meliasi's one rich man, who was scarcely grateful to them. Conn, being entirely human, had a fair appreciation of his own value. He had always meant to find something really good—some day. But he was tied, had been tied for some years, to the New Cumberlands. Why, was his secret.

It was something in the light—or in the wind—or in the rainy pattering of the fountain—or maybe in the scene of the paw-paws and trumpet flowers—but, anyhow, the place seemed curiously solitary that morning, solitary, and yet haunted. Almost he could fancy that he heard a woman's footsteps, where no woman's footsteps ever came, treading delicately the white cool pavement underneath the patio arches; that a rustle of light garments sounded somewhere among the rooms where no one slept. . . . It was the wind in the young cocoanuts; it was the sound of the bougainvillæ blossoms beating against the stones of the verandah arches. There was no one there.

He crossed over again into the dining room. The boys had not cleared away yet; he did not choose to have them inside the enclosure that morning. A

bit of bread and fruit would do him for breakfast. Those mandarins, the Chinese kind, not the large island sort, that had come up for him on yesterday's steamer—they would go well. His guests had been pretty hard on them, but he knew there was one plate left; he had seen it when he put out the lamp last night. A silver plate, on a small stand. . . .

He found the plate, but it was empty.

Poised on one foot, as he had stood to reach across, he remained for a moment, struck, his forehead drawn into sudden wrinkles. Conn had the quick Celtic mind; he did not waste time arguing with himself as to whether he had been mistaken or not. He knew he had not been. He knew he had seen that silver plate full of tiny Chinese mandarins, when he had gone to bed last night, after seeing out all his guests, and locking up the patio. In the night the fruit had gone.

Then, he was not alone.

He drew back his foot, and unconsciously stiffened himself. Who had managed to elude his locking-up precautions; had concealed himself in the house all night? With what object?

Conn thought he could answer that. He was used to being spied on. But how had anyone guessed today was the day he meant to devote to his work?

Fursey might have guessed. Was he as drunk as he had seemed last night? Conn began to think he was not. Easily, he might have been feigning or exaggerating. Certainly he had had his share of wines and liqueurs and whisky, as far as Conn remembered; but Fursey could carry plenty. If he was thirsty this morning, the mandarins would be attractive, and no one would naturally suppose they

would be missed. They would not have been, but for the merest chance.

Still whistling his little tune, Conn left the dining room; nor did he forget to take his handful of fruit and bread, and to eat it as he went into his room. One could eat and think. He sat upon the cushioned box, with his back to the wall, looking about him, and finishing up his imported apricots. He threw the stones out of the window, trying to hit a green and purple parrot that was balancing on a bough. A certain gaiety possessed him. Conn was like that in danger. It might be that he was going to be assassinated that morning. Again, it might be not. Certainly, the possibility put pepper in the day.

Something caught his eye; a box of moth-balls lying on the ground. They had not been there the day before; he could swear to that; he remembered emptying the box of a number of silk cushions for his dinner party, and putting back the moth-balls again with his own hand. He looked into the box. It was empty.

"All the same, I think someone's been there," he thought. "I'm quite a Sherlock Holmes. Pity I can't find any cigar ashes. Well—"

The "well" accompanied a visit to a drawer where reposed a heavy, well-oiled and cared-for Colt revolver. Conn fancied the Colt, had always fancied it, no matter what newer make took public fancy. "It doesn't play you tricks," he said. "And here about Meliasi, you don't want a fancy shooting iron, you are liable to need something that'll blow the inside out of a man at two yards or so, without any fuss."

He put the revolver in his hip pocket, and stood for a moment considering the state of affairs. The result was that, with a smile, he took down his broad-

leafed Panama hat, went somewhat noisily across the patio, and let himself out with his little Bramah key. He locked the gate behind him; it was not commonly locked when he was about—but on this occasion, he thought best to change his usual plan.

Once out, he made for the steps that led to the beach and the boat, and Meliasi town. The wind, warmed by the morning sun, met him over the brow of the hill. Far below the harbour, opaline, green and blue, glittered wonderfully, like a landscape made of Venice glass. Beyond crouched, beastlike, black, their hips furred deep with forest, the unknown hills where dwelt the New Cumberland cannibals. It seemed to Conn, in the sea-wind and the sun, that life was a meat of savour. It was good to be very young, at the end of the world, in a country full of mystery and danger, when other men of his years were feeling the pulses of sick fools, or jotting in ledgers underneath grey office windows, somewhere in the cities far south. It was good, very good, to have found the golden gate to fortune, before one had well begun to look for it. It was a fine thing to be a power in this wild country, to influence its little politics, lead its more daring spirits, to be revered, hated, talked about, plotted against. And to be strong. And to enjoy gold mornings and warm winds, and nights that tingled with stars—yes, to enjoy even food and drink, and tobacco, as he enjoyed them and enjoyed all things. It came to Conn as he went lightfoot down the stairs to the sea beach that he was happy. Happy, even in spite of the want in his life and home; the want that had driven him into dangerous flirtations with the wives of French traders, now and again; that made the flowery emptiness of his courtyard and his house

seem—sometimes—no more than a beautified gaol. He reckoned he could stand that; it wasn't the worst trouble in the world. To think of people in great shops and factories—officers, even, in a man-of-war—never alone, always in company, never possessing their own souls,—to think of men tied to shrews and scolds, badgered daily and nightly. . . .

Yes, he was happy. It struck him that he had never said so, never even consciously thought so, before. He had remembered the little silly things that didn't count, and put them before all the big ones that did. But there was no doubt about it; he had somehow escaped the common doom of man. Almost everyone was unhappy save he, Stephen Conn, who had managed better than the rest of humanity.

Being favoured of the gods, he would know how to deserve their kindness. He would never go about saying that the world was a vale of tears and a grave, and all that sort of nonsense. He would proclaim it aloud for what it was, a garden of brave delights, for brave men to gather.

"There's such a thing as being 'fey,' " he thought. "Now I wonder am I fey? Perhaps I am. Perhaps Fursey is going to get me when I go back again to the house." Conn liked danger; the thought was pungent as cayenne. It added the one touch wanting to his mood of warm content.

So, with a whistled tune on his lips, the man who was one in a million—the man who was happy—turned and went up the steps again, it being no part of his plan to go to Meliasi that day. And at the top of the steps, waiting for him, dark-robed though starry-crowned, sat Sorrow.

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Deirdre, half-frightened, half-delighted with the adventure of it all, had been watching from more than one hiding place that morning, while the man who was, unconsciously, her gaoler, moved from room to room. Once she had been nearly caught, when she ventured out on the verandah, and had to get back, suddenly, with more rustling of draperies than was altogether safe. (But in that tearing trade-wind, who could be sure?) Again, her blood had checked in her veins, and her breath almost stopped, when she saw that he was levelling the muzzle of his revolver towards a slight noise that she had unconsciously made. What if he pulled the trigger? It was as likely as not; there was nothing to pay for pulling triggers in Meliasi. Was she going to be killed? Should she show herself—give herself up? Oh—he had lowered that terrible black muzzle with the clump of snake-nosed cartridges behind it, and was calmly eating apricots. She hoped he hadn't noticed her thefts in the dining room. She wondered why he had made such a breakfast; perhaps he had been too drunk the night before to care for anything solid. Yet he did not look like that. . . . A sudden irrational desire for powder—a hairbrush—a clean dress—took possession of her. How absurd! No one was going to see her, were they? That was the last thing she desired—the very last. . . . She wondered if all the pearling crew were like this Fursey. . . . Oh—he was going—what luck! If he only left the gate open—would he? Peep through the lace curtain; let's see— Brute! Locked!

Deirdre struck her hands, long slender musician's hands, together. It was too bad. Was she never going to get out? Would it really be unsafe to discover herself?

The horrible tales she had heard on the steamer came back in a flood. No, no, no! . . .

There would be some way. People would come to see him, and she might make a bolt for it then; the gate couldn't always be locked. Meantime, he had clearly gone out for the morning; she had seen him disappear over the brow of the cliff.

Now one could come out. What a lark it all was, really. How like some childish game! But she was hungry; that was no game, hard fact. Well, in this extraordinary man's house, where there seemed to be no servants, and nothing was cleared away or washed up, no doubt the dining room would still be an oasis in the desert.

It was, and when one hunted, there was even a spirit lamp and a jug of coffee, easily warmed in the silver kettle. Deirdre made another of her bivouac meals, keeping, meantime, sentry with half her mind, and ready, like a mouse, to flee at the slightest sound.

"I know so exactly how a mouse feels," she thought. "Nibbling, and scuttling, and peering out of its hole. . . . When the cat's away, the mice may play. I wonder if I dare?"

The gleam of a grand piano, dark and shining as waters hid in deep forest, drew her irresistibly from the open sitting-room door. It was unclosed; the long, pied range of keys cried out for touching hands. "And I do," thought Deirdre, craning to see the maker's name—"Yes, it is—I do above all others love a Broadstein!"

The piano stool was just right; no spindly screw affair, but a steady four-legged seat with firm cushions. "Someone who is pretty tall plays on this," she thought, adjusting an extra cushion. "Now—oh, you beauty!"

For the Broadstein, caressed by her skilled fingers, lifted its voice and sang. The room was lofty, and, like all tropical rooms, bare of thick carpeting or draperies. The piano liked it; liked her. Deirdre had a moment of bliss with a fragment from "Peer Gynt" before she remembered herself, and jumped up, frightened, to run to the gate, look out between the bars and listen. Had there been a sound somewhere outside?

No—nonsense. There was no sound or sign of anyone. And now she thought of it, one could not have heard any ordinary light sound over the notes of the piano. It was clearly her own fancy. She was safe. She would go back, and try what she had been longing to try ever since last night—the new verse to her song.

It began, the song as all the world knew it, with two soft chords like a sigh. Then—

"Your shadow on the wall,
Your pictured eyes to watch the live-long day,
Your lips, your longing lips that seem to say—
'One kiss, beloved, deep in dreams tonight,
One long embrace, ere cruel morning light
Wake you to know that dreams, our dreams are all,
That cold we clasp, and shadowlike we kiss,
That all our loves and hopes are only this—
A shadow on the wall.'

"'Your shadow on my heart
Your shade that falls between me and the sun,
That holds me, until all my days are done,
In the dark valleys where no blossoms grow,
But lilies, cloistered lilies, cold as snow,
From love's red roses evermore apart.

I bind them to my breast, I hold them fast,
Ah, Love, I hold, till all my days are past,
Close, close I hold, though tears, though blood drops
start,
Your shadow on my heart.' "

She sang it through, with her little, golden voice, and paused for a moment, her hands upon the keys. Shaw—Adrian Shaw—she had not felt that about him. She had only thought she felt it.

Yet one might feel it, for another man—someone whom one could imagine, whom one had never known. A wind from the cold valleys where misfortune dwells blew over the girl; she shuddered.

"God keep me from knowing such a man," she said. She struck the keys with the grand sweep that ushered in the new, last verse.

"Your shadow on my heart. . . .

O Love, look up with me, and see at last,
When our long agony is overpast,
In rainbow rays the clouds afar shall roll,
Leaving your light, Love's light, the light of Heaven,
For ever in my soul!"

Deirdre, artist-fashion, had forgotten herself, forgotten where she was, and what risks she ran. She let the splendid Broadstein have its will. Up to the ceiling, and round the high frieze of the room, out across the patio, mingling with the song of the fountain, and raising on the wings of the trade-wind, went her music. She ended. The glory of the notes was on her like a glory from the heaven of which she wrote. Vibrating with tone and with emotion, she

leaned her head on the piano, and tears came—not for Adrian Shaw, forgotten and married long ago, but for some sorrow that seemed nameless, bitter, world-wide, and that yet, in some strange fashion, was hers.

Then, behind her, in a man's voice, came suddenly the last phrase of her song, sung far better than she, with her small sweet voice, could sing it—

“Your light, Love's light, the light of Heaven,
For ever in my soul!”

Deirdre turned and sprang like a shot hare. Facing her stood the man whom she had watched in secret, from whom, half-heartedly, she had fled.

“You are Deirdre!” he said to her.

“And you,” she answered him breathlessly, “are not Fursey!”

“Fursey! Not by a long shot,” he said, showing a good set of teeth in an honest laugh. “Fursey!

Now what made you think so? And why— Well, I'm not asking that; no whys at all. Don't tell me; I'd rather not know. You're not true; you're something out of a nursery fairy tale. You've been eating in my little plate, and drinking out of my little cup, and sleeping in my little bed—”

“Oh, no, I didn't,” broke in Deirdre, “I was afraid. I slept underneath it!”

“Where, in goodness name?” asked the man through a shout of laughter.

“Across the patio. The room with the big mirror—”

“Naturally!” He had the brightest of grey eyes; they were steady, and held hers even in the midst of his laughing.

She began to explain.

"No, don't," he begged, pulling a chair behind her, and when she took it, sitting down himself upon the piano stool. "As soon as you explain, you'll not be a fairy story any more, and you'll want to go. Give me that new verse of yours again, the modulation's better. Play the accompaniment — here, change with me. I know the air, but I must have those chords. This it?" He leaned over her and touched the keys.

"No, no," corrected the composer. "Very nearly, but— Here, play the sharp; don't you see you shift into the major?"

"Right; I'm an ass. Heaven's always major; one ought to know that. 'For ever in my soul.' Good. You ought to have written it that way at first; why didn't you?"

"I don't know." She suddenly felt that she did know; if she only stopped to think, but that she would not stop to think. She would not tell herself, or him, whence those clanging, crying chords, that mounting sadness and glory, had taken birth, last night.

"I must go," she broke in, rising to her feet. "You really must let me explain—"

"Explain," he said, turning round from the piano, with his hands still on the keys, and keeping up a little undercurrent of sound. He was polite now; a grave gentleman, not a boy.

Deirdre told her story, briefly and somewhat unsteadily. The strain of the night was beginning to make its mark.

"Well," he said, his fingers rippling sadly along the keys, "the fairy tale's over; of course you won't stay. Will you?" He was quite serious.

"No, thank you," said Deirdre, wondering all the while if he were mad, or she. "I—I'd like—to get my trunk," she added. "It has been in the bushes all night."

"My boys," said the man, "will be back almost at once; I hoisted the signal for them. You'll have time to tidy in my room, if you want to. Your hat's on quite straight (for she had replaced it) and your hands are clean, and you don't need any powder at all, but you can take some out of my shaving kit. My room's—"

"I know," she said. "I was in the box."

"You were?" he said. It seemed he was not given to showing surprise, even when he felt it. "Last night?"

"Yes—till you went out."

"I hope Fursey was not—" He was self-possessed certainly, but she detected a grain of anxiety in his eye.

"If he was," she answered directly, "I didn't hear him."

"Ah, well, I can tell you, it's lucky for you, since you were out for hitting wrong islands, that you did not hit his."

"You haven't told me what this one is yet," stated Deirdre, pausing in the doorway.

"This is Wawa."

"I know that. I thought Wawa was—I forget what. No one could remember those names."

"They aren't easy. But my name is Conn, and I'm a fairly respectable resident. The Mission island isn't far away. My boys will take you in the boat." She wondered how he had guessed, that after all the events of the night, she would rather he did not escort her himself. She felt suddenly very tired.

In Conn's room, she gave a few feminine touches at the glass, thinking she looked white. The last new verse of her song kept crying in her mind.

"God keep me from knowing such a man," she said. Outside, she could hear the boat's crew, summoned by signal, running into the yard.

CHAPTER VI

UNTIL the last echo of the New Cumberland natives' singing died down over the brow of the hill, Conn the Hundred Fighter stood on his courtyard steps. A few minutes longer he waited; then he climbed to the little peak that rose above the house, and watched, from his eagle-eyrie, the boat creeping many-legged and swift, like some strange water insect, over the sea to Waka. There was no mistake this time. He had not thought there would be, else no intuition of Deirdre's overwrought longing for solitude had kept him from accompanying her. But Conn's boys were not in the habit of making mistakes; they had too much respect for that chilled-steel temper of his, and for the terrible sting-ray tail that hung in his room. There is no more frightful instrument of punishment in the world than the long, whalebone-like, spike-strewn tail of the giant stingaree; and in the New Cumberlands, in the days of which I tell, more than one native had met his death by it. Conn was no mere brute, no Legree, in his dealings with the practically enslaved cannibals who worked his boat and his house for him, but nobody had ever accused him of being an indulgent master. The coxswain of the boat had been given quite plainly to understand that any mistake in conveying the White Chieftainess safely to the Mission

would mean an hour of reckoning that would leave him too sick to work for a week.

So Conn was as sure as one may be sure of anything in this world that Deirdre would be safely landed. Nevertheless, he stood on the peak of the island, watching through a fine pair of binoculars, till the boat, small as an ant, crawled to rest by the thread-like Mission pier; till two little pale dots crept down the shore to meet it, and three little pale dots returned all together; till the little pale dots, all merged in one now, melted away under the shadow of the tiny, black and white flecked domino that was the Mission house. Then he lowered his glass, and returned. The gate of the patio clanged shut behind him. He stood alone under the pillars of the verandah, listening and looking; he walked through every room, and—this time—looked in boxes and under beds, a half smile flickering on his hard young cheek as he did so.

"I was getting damned careless," he said to himself. "It wanted something to wake me up."

There was no one in the unused rooms; no one hiding in chests or behind mosquito nets. Conn's own footsteps made the only sound, his breathing the only life, in the still house. It came upon him with a sudden rush how lonely it was—how terribly lonely his life. In the act of singling a certain key, small and curiously shaped, from a bunch attached to his watch chain, he paused, stared, and stood motionless for quite a while.

Then he shook himself back to life. "Dreaming, you beggar," he said. "No dreaming. No dreaming, no loafing. Less whisky, if you please, as well. You're nearer the edge than I like."

For he knew, as none but dwellers in the lonely

lands do know, what dangers wait upon the self-indulgent, there, where a man has only himself to depend upon; only his own small thread of character and pluck to bridge him across gulfs that lead to madness, and to the slow mind-rotting that is commoner, but not less terrible. He had seen the trailing step, the staring eye, the hands that had lost all grip and skill, the death-in-life of men who had once been as gods in their strength and pride. He had seen them lie all day on their island mats, facing the sea, and staring hypnotized at the breaking waves; fed by natives on native food; clothed scarce at all, not thinking or reading ever, but smoking, drinking—not always drinking; there were more subtle causes of downfall than the bottle or the kava bowl—but always, always, idly, endlessly, dreaming. . . .

He shuddered, as does a thin-skinned horse when touched by a poisonous fly.

“Not for mine,” said Conn of the Hundred Fights. He stood once more, for a tense moment, listening and looking, and then entered a room that looked like an ordinary business office. It was lit by a skylight and it had a leather-covered, sloping desk, some large account books, a copying press, a typewriter, and in one corner, standing on the floor, a steel safe of the latest burglar-proof pattern. Carefully working the combination, he opened it. There were documents on the shelves, a cash box, and a small tray full of gold nuggets, neatly sorted according to size. In the lower part, it held a pell-mell of trade goods samples, such as natives delight in; strings of beads, large and small, combs, looking glasses, belts of many coloured stuffs. All these were marked with prices and figures; it seemed that Conn

kept memoranda of his profits in dealing with the native tribes, and had reasons of his own for keeping those profits secret.

Once more he listened and looked about him, and then took out of the safe a few strings of the beads, and two belts, made of velvet—one deep blue, and one creamy yellow. He smoothed them out on a small flat table that stood under the skylight, and contemplated them with interest. "I think the yellow is a bit off in colour," he said to himself; and then, "Talking aloud, you beggar; haven't I told you about that before?" In silence he held up the two pieces of stuff, and compared them. In silence he reached for a string of the blue beads. . . .

"Damn the bell!" he barked. Outside, at the patio gate, a bell was jangling furiously.

"Ring away," Conn silently adjured the interrupter. The interrupter, as if he had heard, did ring away. Jing-jing-jang went the bell. Jang-jangle-jang. Tang-tankle, tang-tankle. Jang!

"Broken," thought Conn, as the sound ceased abruptly. "Now perhaps you'll go away."

But the persistent visitor did not go away. Instead, he began a steady rattling on the gate. It sounded as if he had picked up a stone, and was battering the iron-work.

Now Conn had had the iron-work newly painted, only a week before, and in the islands paint is paint. With a brief stinging aspiration as to the caller's future fate, he flung his trade goods into the safe, locked it, locked the door of the room, and came out into the patio.

"Confound you, Gatehouse," he said, "you must have taken off a yard of my paint. What do you

want, and why must you batter the house down? You've smashed the bell, too."

He was unlocking as he spoke. The Secretary, standing outside in the fierce New Cumberland sun, looked at him with inexpressive black-glassy eyes, from under the deep brim of his pith helmet, before he spoke. It was a trick he had; his words seemed always a little slow in making their way to the surface.

When he did speak, it was to the purpose.

"The Commissioner sent me to see if the lady passenger from the steamer is here. She's lost."

"Come inside," said Conn. He did not love Gatehouse, but he was always hospitable. "Have a drink. Sit down. No, she's not here. What on earth made you think she was?"

"The Commissioner was informed," said Gatehouse, "that she was seen leaving the ship in a canoe just before dusk, but that the Mission people had seen nothing of her. We've sent to Fursey's island"—he had all the Secretary's mannerisms, Conn noted; he always spoke, when possible, in the plural—"but couldn't find any trace, and some of the boys thought she might be here."

Conn bustled about among his glasses and decanters, back turned. He had to think quickly. Meliasi was no strait-laced spot, but that very fact made it certain that Deirdre's innocent adventure might have an ugly colour put on it. . . .

He turned round again.

"Say when," he remarked. "I can tell you just where she is, and that's at the Mission. She borrowed my boat early this morning, and went over in it, and I saw her land."

"Oh," commented Gatehouse, in a tone that

sounded as if it ought to go with a single eyeglass. Then—"But where did she get to? The Commissioner'll want to know."

Conn did some more rapid thinking.

"She seems to have been wandering all over the harbour in that dashed canoe they put her into," was his reply. "I'm going to have a talk with the mate when the 'Tyre' returns."

Gatehouse swallowed a mouthful or two, and set down his glass. He did not speak for some time. Conn was resolved that he would not speak either. Least said, soonest mended.

"We should like to be satisfied where she was," was what Gatehouse brought up at last from the depths of his consciousness.

"Didn't I tell you where she was?"

"Was she here? They may make a sort of official matter of it, you know. It seemed she'd letters to the Commissioner."

Conn did not see, under the circumstances, that he was bound to lie. He gave the Secretary a brief résumé of the facts.

Gatehouse did not seem particularly interested. He made a note or two, and said he'd inform the Commissioner, and "we" would see she was looked after during the rest of her stay. "The beggar's made of starch and red tape," thought Conn. "Hang it, he never even asked what she's like, and she's as pretty as Billy-be-dam." His young man's pride in a romantic adventure with a pretty woman felt lowered.

It was for this reason that he nailed the departing subject down and informed the Secretary, without being asked, that the girl had a jolly name; suited her, too, because she was a no-end jolly girl.

"Deirdre," he said, "Deirdre. Pretty, isn't it? She writes songs—those well-known songs. Everyone sings them. She's Irish—Antrim. (For so Deirdre told him, while waiting for the boat.) I'm Kerry myself, but I like the Black North. 'Dark and true and tender'—you know. Miss Rogers—"

"Miss WHAT?"

Gatehouse was awake now. His black-glassy eyes had turned to flame; there was colour in his cold face. "What did you say her name was?" he demanded.

"Rogers."

Gatehouse became silent again, and looked at him with a drawing-out expression. The traders and planters who came to see the Commissioner on various sorts of business generally told all they knew—and often more than they knew they told—when the Secretary treated them to that knowing, sympathetic silence of his. But Conn was of another clay.

"No, you don't," he said to himself. "You seem to have heard something about her, but you'll learn no more than you know from me." And he busied himself filling up the Secretary's glass.

"No more," objected Gatehouse hurriedly. "Too early in the morning." And then, because he had been hustled into speech after all—"About what age is she?"

The devil entered into Conn.

"Not a day over eight-and-thirty," he said with emphasis, as if he were trying to persuade himself. "And very well preserved. Plenty to say for herself. Can look after herself jolly well, my word! Regular globe-trotter, she is. Seen everything, been everywhere. Think you know her?"

He chuckled to himself. The words were so true, the impression they all in all conveyed, so false! Conn was not above a falsehood of that description in a good cause. His Celtic wiliness rather enjoyed it.

Something primitive, furious, male, seemed to die out of Gatehouse's face as he spoke. It became, once more, the steady, inexpressive countenance of the Secretary. Conn had seen; he was more than a little puzzled. If Gatehouse knew this charming little Deirdre—who was not, he would swear, nearly up to her thirtieth year—why didn't he know her age? And if he did not know her, why look at a man who—well, a man who had behaved exceedingly well, by Jupiter!—with that pistols-for-two-and-coffee-for-one expression of a minute ago?

It struck Conn—not quite for the first time—that the Secretary was a man to be counted with. Perhaps more so, after all, than bluff British Blackbury. What nationality was Gatehouse, by the way? The name seemed English, but—

“Have a cigar before you go,” he suggested. Conn's cigars were famous in Meliasi. No one else could afford such smokes. The Secretary sat down again.

“Are you Irish?” bounced out Conn. He was sure that he could tell by Gatehouse's way of accepting or denying the suggestion. No one is indifferent to the charge of Celtic blood; it is proudly accepted, or fiercely denied, as the case may be.

“Not I,” was Gatehouse's slightly contemptuous answer. “Welsh descent.”

“Not a Welsh name.”

“No. My father took my mother's.”

That was true, thought Conn. “Ever been in

Ireland?" he ventured, nipping his cigar. Gatehouse seemed too much occupied with the matches to reply. They certainly were damp; the weather had been rainy. . . .

"By the way," he said, when his cigar was alight, "you are descended from the Kings of Ireland yourself, aren't you?"

"My dear fellow," was Conn's reply, "have you ever read Thackeray?"

"Pretty well all," answered the Secretary.

"Then you won't want to know why I prefer not to make any such claims. Every grocer in Sandymount or Kingstown is descended from Brian Boru."

"But you are royal blood?" insisted Gatehouse. It seemed to interest him.

"I can only say our pedigree is a jolly sight better authenticated than most. Names and places, you know. And old curios. And the land my granduncle holds near Tara—yes, it's a good claim. What do you want to know for? No man on earth is really interested in any other man's pedigree, or believes in it. That's an axiom."

"I wish to God I was royal," said Gatehouse in a sudden burst. Then he began to laugh. "Good joke," he said. "You thought I meant it." He became silent, and finished his cigar without another word. When it was done, he rose to say good-bye.

"But you did mean it," thought Conn, as he shut the gate. "I wonder, by any chance, if I am going mad? The things that have happened in this last twenty-four hours make one feel jolly like it."

He took out the little Bramah key again, went into his office, and began turning over the strings of trade beads. Presently he took a tiny case of tools from an upper shelf of the safe. Under the

skylight, head bent down, he worked for a long time. The sun, striking directly down upon his head, warned him of the time of day. He got up, stretched himself, locked everything away, and went to open the gate. Outside it stood, yawning and bored, his boat's crew and his three cooky boys.

"You leavem that fellow Mary all right along Mission?" he demanded.

"Me leavem," answered the coxswain, a bison-faced, hairy brute with a boar's tusk thrust through his nose.

"Suppose you no talk true along me, bime-by I cut out altogether soul belong you, belt you along hell."

"Me leavem, true," repeated the cannibal, trembling.

"Then go and get your kai-kai, and you cookies go and get kai-kai belong me."

He went back into the house. There was nothing more to do for the day; nothing to look forward to but meals, as if one had been a ship-wrecked sailor—as if one had been a man in gaol. What else was he, it occurred to Conn the Hundred Fighter. What else was this fine, empty house of his but a gaol for himself and his solitary thoughts? It was reeking with loneliness, it smelt of it; loneliness gathered in dark corners as a poisonous fog; loneliness sat on the lintel of the door, like a taloned crow, ready to set its claws in him as he came in. . . .

Food was cooked, eaten, and cleared away. The noises of the kitchen ceased; it was afternoon. On the pale concrete of the patio shadows began to lengthen and grow blue. The day was almost gone, and Conn, who in the morning, had run up the island stairs, light-hearted with life and happiness, knew, with the sinking sun, that he was—unhappy.

CHAPTER VII

IN Meliasi, in the New Cumberlands, about the wild Western Pacific generally, one may safely assume concerning any settlement, without seeing it, that its inhabitants resemble the over-advertised little girl with the curl, in that—

“When they are good, they are very, very good,
And when they are bad, they are horrid.”

There are few greys, few half lights or shadows in the Western Islands. We of Melanesia are one thing or the other, with emphasis. We may be missionaries dripping with piety, as a roast goose drips with fat; we may be beachcombers living ungodly lives in the midst of native ladies and exotic drinks; we may be Government officials composed of starch and red tape, or wild recruiters of the black-birding breed, ready to row a whaleboat-and-twelve through any native protection act ever passed. We are seldom, very seldom, just commonplace, fairly respectable folk. If we had been, we should have stayed among the tram-lines and picture-shows, two thousand miles away. . . .

Conn, as a white Melanesian, knew all this. Conn, passing through the one street of the capital, with his long loping gait that spoke of hard tramps and many, thought on various subjects. Conn, on

the whole, was inclined to feel like the player in a Rugby match who gets hold of the ball, and flings himself on it to keep it. The player's opponents are twenty-nine to one, and they mean to have that ball. . . .

His opponents, here in Melanesia, were a hundred to one; the ball was his secret, and they meant to have him off it. If he did not come off, he would be kicked off, sooner or later.

On the whole he wondered that he had been allowed to keep it so long. Public opinion, he knew, was getting up to boiling point. Nobody was rich in the New Cumberlands. Plantations, in spite of labour that was practically slave labour, seldom paid well. Trading brought big returns, but the traders did not often live to enjoy them; there were not, in the New Cumberlands all told, more traders existent at any one time than there were men on the celebrated "Dead man's chest," and for the same reason—

"Drink and the devil had done for the rest."

Everybody had half a dozen ways of making a fortune, but nobody's way ever came to anything—except Conn's—nobody, at the end of years of struggle with companies that would not float, stores that went "broke," mines that turned out nothing but calls to shareholders, ever, ever, ever attained the Manoa, the visionary golden land.

Except Conn.

The French millet planter's wife and child could not afford to go to Sydney for a change. The Anglo-Baptist Mission had holes in its chapel roof. The double-verandahed house at the end of the street didn't see even tinned meat on the table, some days,

that were not fast days of any church. Des Roseaux drank red-ink claret; Blackbury's house had streaky unwashed floors because he could not keep more than a couple of boys. The tale was the same all through Meliasi. And Conn, Conn who had come up there six years before a mere lad fresh from his University, and had started a little plantation like all the rest—Conn, whose plantation was running wild in the bush, whose labour force was disbanded, who didn't raise a nut, or sell a cartridge or a scrap of cotton; Conn, who like the lilies of the field, toiled not, neither spinned—Conn was rich!

And any one of them might be as rich as he was, if they only knew what he knew. And he wouldn't tell, and he couldn't be entrapped. Meliasi, as he walked through it that afternoon, looked at him much as the chorus of villains looks at the hero in a Verdi opera, and in much the same way, told itself that "a time would come. . . ."

Out of the swinging trade-wind, it was hot, down there. Shadows lay like mantles of black fur, on the glaring coral sand of the roadway. The iron shanties that stood for stores, homes, hotels, fairly spat heat at you as you passed, from their unpainted walls, too hot to put the hand on. The flat sea dazzled like an open furnace door. Conn, impervious to heat, slung along. He was wanted up at the Commissioner's; the message had come by one of Blackbury's boys, and, understanding very well what it meant, he had stopped off at the township, to make a purchase or two, before going on to the Residency island.

There were more than Conn who guessed at the meaning of the message, when the uniformed boy, in his Fiji-pattern vandyked loin-cloth, went past.

Three or four men running up the harbour in a lugger with a boom proportioned to the hull as a grasshopper's huge leg is proportioned to its trifling body, saw Blackbury's messenger paddle across to Wawa; saw Conn return with him; saw the white man go into a store and leave an order, and then go back across the narrow strait to the overhanging islet whereon the Residency was built.

They looked at each other and laughed. The man with the tiller, who seemed to be in command of the boat and the party generally, said something to his neighbour, and changed the course, heading for the pier.

"No shelling today," said the steersman. "Something better to do than fishing jobs," agreed a loose-limbed fellow, loafing in the stern.

"Come with me, and I will make you fishers of men," quoted the steersman blasphemously. The others roared.

Under full sail, in the streaming of the strong south-east, the lugger leaned and flew. Fursey, handling her as a master of sail, drove her up to the jetty, foam flying, canvas booming, as if he would have smashed her into the piles. The native crew stood ready, and at Fursey's shout, swung the lugger into the wind so smartly that she drew up alongside like a motor car stopping at a doorway.

"Where to?" asked the loose-limbed man, as they stepped ashore.

Fursey looked up at him. It was a long way to look; he was scarcely five feet four in height; a pocket Hercules sort of a man, with shoulders disproportionately broad, and the loose-limbed man was nearly six feet five. Yet you might have betted, with safety, on Fursey's chances, in the event of a

fight. Big men are seldom overcharged with life and the fury of life, as small ones sometimes are. There was the dynamic force of three in the little fellow who strutted by the big man's side. His eyes showed it, fierce brown, full of sparkles, and set low beneath eyebrows as straight and heavy as a charcoal stick. His mouth, sealing-wax red, under its pointed, curling moustache, was greedy and eager; charged, at the same time, with a certain furious capability and force; the mouth of a leader. His nose was crooked; one ear, bent in on itself and notched, looked as if it had been chewed by an angry dog. He walked in a jumpy, tittupping style, as if it would take little to make him break into a dance. You felt, on looking at him, that he was a man who might be, as circumstances chanced, something rather fine, or something extremely vile; that he was dangerous—if he was—not so much because of any innate bent towards evil, as because he had never denied, and never so long as he lived and breathed, would deny, Jack Fursey anything that Jack Fursey wanted.

He answered the other man after a second or two, meant to show his authority.

"You can go and wait for me at the banyan. I'll see what stores have been bought. It might be our chance this time."

"Reilly says," put in another man, "that there's talk of calling a meeting of all the citizens, French and English, and demanding Conn should disclose, for the good of the country."

"A fat lot he would mind the good of the country. Would you?"

"Maybe I would, if they threatened to boycott me at the stores and everywhere else."

"Maybe you would," said Fursey, strutting head up, "but maybe no one else but a born fool would. S' long as a man has a few cartridges he don't depend altogether on stores. He could always make the nigs hand over. Conn could hold out. That's not the way. Maybe Jack can show you a better trick than that."

He had a habit of speaking of himself as "Jack," oddly egotistical in effect. The other men looked at him and laughed.

"A nice Sunday-school sort of way, Parson, I hope," said one of them.

Fursey, who had actually, at one time of his life, studied for the ministry somewhere—no one knew what ministry, or where—was known, among other less reputable nicknames, as the "Parson." It was inappropriate enough to enrapture his very un-parsonic associates; and it gave an extra flavour to the astonishing bursts of profanity that were their envy and delight.

"You can let me alone for that," was the answer. "Child," to the tall man, "we'll want to know what stores he got; cut and see. And send Maraki up to the Commissioner's, one-time; savvy?"

"I savvy," said the big fellow, "Maraki's worth his weight in gold."

"Don't be seen talking to him," warned Fursey, "or you make him useless."

"He'll be at his house in the native camp. No white men there. Where'll he meet you?"

"Under the banyan. Come there yourself. Smith and Mac, you might just as well stay with the boat. We'll be going back in no time."

The long-legged Child melted away; he never seemed to walk like other people, but to slip or glide.

So does the island cannibal move. It is possible that Child—of whom strange things were told on lone south-windy evenings, under verandah roofs—had acquired the habit during the periods he had spent alone among the native tribes, on far-out, almost never visited islands.

The other pearling men were a trifle shy of him; no one knew quite why. Fursey, whom nothing shocked, nothing daunted, made a special friend of him.

It was not far to the banyan tree, though the latter was in the midst of untouched, tropic forest. Meliasi, in those comparatively recent times, looked, as it stood on the white beach, with the white foaming reef in front of it, like a group of frightened houses that had just rushed out of the forest, to make a stand upon the open shore, against some wild-wood dragon that ate up little tin shanties and crunched their bones. You could have thrown a stone from the main street into the bush. And into the bush, near as it was to the row of bungalows, stores, saloons, shell and copra warehouses, no one—almost—ever went. Why should they? The road to the back country went not through the bush, but along the open shore. There was nothing at all in the great forest that anybody could want, and there might be things nobody wanted—a dum-dum'd bullet from a New Cumberland native's gun; a poisoned arrow perhaps; plenty of snakes, to a certainty. . . .

Fursey, leaving Smith, who was just a Smith, and the red-haired Mac, to go back to the jetty, followed the beach road himself until a turn took it out of sight of the township, when he dodged off it right into the dense forest, pressing aside a mass of thick growing boughs to do so. Behind the boughs lay

a track, narrow but neatly cut, and kept always open. Fursey, in this, had adopted a New Cumberland native custom which seemed good to him. The cannibal of these western islands usually masks his roads as far as possible, cutting them clear through the bush until the last few yards, when he stays his knife and tomahawk and leaves a few yards of growing underbush between the track and the open.

Fursey, with his dancing step, went along the track, whistling as he went. He whistled native fashion, notes without a tune. No need to advertise oneself. But whistle he felt he must. He was, in his own terms, "feeling good" that day. If you or anyone else had come along and asked him to do you a good turn—to lend you money; to subscribe to your pet charity; to put you up for a week—Fursey would certainly have done it. The prospect he had glimpsed of robbing Conn successfully at last was so pleasing that one thinks he would even have gone to church, if one of Meliasi's numerous missionaries had asked him just at that point—would have sung in the hymns, and put money in the plate as well. But, indeed, to do him justice, Fursey was prepared, as a rule, to be good-natured and obliging, so long as it did not inconvenience him in any way. Just like you, or like me. . . .

The banyan, in the heart of the deep bush that stretched behind Meliasi, was a forest in a forest. It might have covered a couple of acres. It had more columns than a cathedral, more dark tattered flags drooping in its windless calm than any nave under European skies. In among the columns, among the stalactites of aerial root that had not yet touched earth, wound countless little tracks; pig tracks, bandicoot and wallaby tracks, tracks of the

splay-footed, man-long iguana. All the strange small peoples of the bush, the "little brothers and sisters," knew of the banyan tree-forest, made their homes in it, and hunted their food among its silent shadowy colonnades. Men did not come there—often. The little brothers felt safe, most days, from those big, ruthless relatives who tramped so hard and high, and carried such cruel, far-reaching claws of their own. Such folk could not come along the slender bandicoot and iguana roads; they had a road of their own, cut winding in and out through the maze of the columned stems, right to the heart of all, where the mother trunk, from which the whole wide forest had started, stood crumbling away to ruin in the midst of her thousand children.

There was a rough seat or two, made by felling the nearer stems. And at the seats, the beauty of the forest broke off. For there were bottles there, empty bottles strewn in dozens about the ground, and there were bits of newspapers, and handfulls of spent matches, and banana skins, and mango kernels, covered with blue mould. It was the chosen retreat of Fursey and his crowd, when they came over to Meliasi, and it bore the marks of their passing.

Fursey, waiting for Child and the native, sat astride one of the logs, still whistling. His soft felt hat was drawn, as usual, half over one eye; his waist, springy and tough as a slim hibiscus tree, was sashed round with a crimson handkerchief. Another hung loosely about his neck. He had a knife on one hip, and a Smith and Wesson in a leather sheath, dangling from the other. Fursey was practically two-handed, and prided himself on it not a little. He read American desperado fiction, and modelled himself

on the costumes and demeanour of its "bad men." People who did not understand the little autocrat of Wakaka Island, thought him a consummate joke.

Maraki, coming soundlessly through the bush, and looking at his chief as he came, thought nothing of the kind. The New Cumberland native—a clever fellow for his race—understood just the kind of loaded pinfire cartridge that Fursey was, and handled him accordingly. It would never have surprised Maraki if Fursey, in a fit of half-humourous caprice, had snatched out that barking little gun, and shot him dead. Therefore Maraki, gliding through the bush with no more noise than any other shadow stirred by passing beast or bird, kept his old Brown Bess musket upon his shoulder, with the muzzle covering the chest of the white man.

Farther off than any other white man would have heard him, the pearler did, and greeted him with a sort of whale-spout of swearing, mostly good-humoured. Maraki, standing at a respectful distance, waited till the spout had rushed up, flickered, and gone down again. Then he spoke.

"Me hearem."

"You hearem, eh? Hearem Blackbury, hearem Conn?"

"E! Hearem altogether, me-fellow. Me-fellow go all same lat (rat) under house, hearem Belakiburi talk along Conni. Belakiburi him say—'Too much dam row New Cumberlan' boy makem along Koro. White man one he killem'—"

"That would be Green," commented Fursey, unmoved, to Child, who had just come up. "I always said they'd get him if he wouldn't take the trouble of shifting his bed every night. Lazy beggar, Green.

I don't take any stock in laziness. Specially for a trader in these parts. He's got to keep his eyes skinned, and his wits on the jump. Well?"

"He told me," put in Child, "he says, as far as I can make out, that Blackbury's made up his mind to try a punitive expedition. Probably chance what the Colonial Office will say. I reckon he won't tell them much, anyhow. He wants Conn to come along and back him up; seems he has an unflattering sort of opinion of the rest of the town, and said so; even the nigger took it. Conn knew all about it before he was sent for. Must have meant to go out himself. Bought stores for three or four days. I reckon Blackbury aims to keep him from jumping his job too much, as well as getting help from him."

"Are they off yet?"

"Getting the whaleboat out, and loading her, when I left. Be round the point by now."

"Then this," said Fursey, rising to his feet, and doing a step or two of a coon shuffle dance, "this is the best chance we're going to get."

"You make me tired," came in Child's odd, lifeless voice. He looked down at Fursey from his towering height. He seemed not half awake, and yet somehow formidable, as a dozing snake is formidable. "Why should you think Conn will go off and leave things open for you and me to run through?"

"You make *me* tired with your damn think, think, thinking. I don't think. I know. I take chances. There's one now. If there isn't—" He said what would happen to himself and other people, if there was not. He used the subjunctive and imperative moods, and hung candles over them.

Child waited till he had done, and then asked

him if he had got any whisky. He himself had been in too much of a hurry to stop for it.

Fursey nodded towards the hollow old banyan trunk in the midst of its daughter columns. Child stretched a huge arm, and pulled out a bottle. He drank.

"You know," he said by and by, "there's something about that Secretary chap—"

"I know," said Fursey, still shuffle-dancing. It seemed as if he never could keep quiet.

"Something," concluded Child, "that one likes, rather."

"Sometimes," said Fursey, dancing in the dust, "you talk as if you'd been to Harrow."

"So I was, damn me," answered Child.

"Oh, you're damned quite enough," answered Fursey. He never stopped dancing.

Child looked as if he could have struck him.

"Don't," said Fursey. "The islands will stand a good deal, but they wouldn't stand that if I yapped. I would, you know. You're an *âme damnée* as we used to call it. My *âme damnée*," he laughed. "As long as I know, and no one else does. Ho-o, Child, if I yapped?"

Child looked at him again. You might—if you had been thinking of snakes—have thought just then how they looked when they waked up from sleep, and let a black tongue waver in and out of scaled, seeming-close-shut lips. But he said nothing.

"Well," said Fursey, suddenly ceasing his shuffle, "it's 'Home, boys, home, and it's home we ought to be.'" He sang the line not unmelodiously. "Maraki, you clear out. We'll wait five minutes to let him get well off. He's too useful to spoil, is Maraki."

"What are you going to do?" asked Child. "You know Conn locks up when he goes away."

"I'm going," said Fursey, "to get over the gate with a plain common ladder, and then put a small tooth-comb through the house. And you and Smith and Mac are going to help me."

"Do you think you'll find what it is?" asked Child, with somewhat more than the usual flavour of scorn in his voice. He always spoke to Fursey scornfully, because Fursey, he felt, was an "outsider." He was afraid of him, in spite of the scorn. Fursey usually spoke teasingly and sometimes insultingly to Child. He liked him, on the whole, and it was nothing at all to him that Child did not return the liking.

"No. I think we'll find out something that will help us to find out what it is."

"Now you're talking."

"I generally do," swelled Fursey. "Come on."

Through the banyan forest they had to walk duck-file, but once out on the beach roadway Child lunged up alongside the tripping Fursey.

"I heard something else in the town," he said. "You know the girl who came up last week on the boat, who's been staying at the Mission?"

"Yes," said Fursey, twirling his absurdly long and spiked moustache. "Her name's Miss Rogers. She's about five feet five, brown hair, lots of it, with a shade of red and gold in the sun—I like them with that hair—hazel eyes as big as your fist, nice little mouth, kissable, quite—good figure, a bit on the slim side, large two in shoes, I should say, five and three-quarters in gloves. About twenty-six, or maybe twenty-seven. Whatever she's come up for, it's not to be a missionary." He twirled his moustache again, and walked more than ever on his toes.

"Been intending to call at the Mission, and get another look at her—"

"You seem to have made the best of any look you've had."

"Saw her once, for ten seconds, on the steamer, night she came in. Well, I haven't gone to the Mission yet, because there's what you call a coolness—on account of those native girls—"

"I know."

"But if I don't run across her anywhere else, I will, and chance it. 'S not often one gets a look at a decent looking skirt up here."

"Well, I can tell you something," said Child, and he related the tale of Deirdre's mistake; of her fear that she had found the pearl-ers' island, and her lying hidden in Conn's house, through the dinner and through the night that followed. How had the tale got out? Conn had not told, neither, assuredly, had Deirdre. . . . Maraki, perhaps, with his lurkings and watchings, might have been able to say. There are few secrets kept in the world of the western islands.

Fursey yelled with laughter; he staggered with it; he stopped on the road to lean up against a palm trunk, and laugh and laugh.

"Thought she'd struck Wawaka; oh, my Lord!" he crowed. "Why didn't she? Eh, why didn't she, old son?"

Suddenly he stopped his laughter; stopped Child, too, in some comments that the latter was making, expressive of his belief that the tale would bear another colour than that put on it. "Let me think," he said. He became grave, chewed the ends of his moustache, and walked along with a sober gait. They neared the town; the little band of fugitive,

lost houses, balancing on the edge of the sea, came into sight; the sunset, grave and golden, showed between the blackening peaks of Wawa and Wawaka islands. Child had not spoken again. It was never advisable to interrupt Furse's fits of deliberation. There had been a man on the pearling island, years ago, who had gone all his days to death with a blinded eye, because of one such interruption. . . .

Furse drew a long breath, let go his moustache, and began to talk.

"The whaleboat'll be half-way there by dark," he said. "Give them tomorrow and the day after to square things up, and the evening to return. That gives us all the time we want." But Child knew, somehow, that he was not, for the moment, thinking of Conn.

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Up on the top of the Commissioner's high, windy island, Gatehouse, the Secretary, left alone, wandered restlessly about. From verandah to verandah he went, watching the whaleboat through a field-glass till it vanished round a point of rocky land; then stared down moodily upon the tossing sea of palm-tops spread below the house. Alone, like this, he was not the man that Conn had seen; not even the man that the Commissioner knew in his daily work—quiet, courteous, non-committal, and all the time cold, cold. . . . Alone, Gatehouse became himself.

His eyes, veiled no longer, showed the black fire that smouldered, daily, unseen. The thin tight lips were tight no longer; they opened over pointed teeth, and laughed, now and then, at some strange thought or fancy that never came to the birth of words. His

very limbs seemed to relax; he sprawled when he sat down, loafed over the verandah rail when he looked out upon the sea. He stretched his arms above his head in an abandonment of ease.

A native, paddling up to the steps of the front verandah, shuffled and coughed as natives do, to attract his attention. Gatehouse, in an instant became his daily self again, and moved round to the front of the house. It was an island chief who was waiting, a big buck of a fellow with the inevitable old, yet deadly musket slung over his shoulder, trigger on full cock, and muzzle bobbing defiance. No one in Meliasi ever understood how it was that accidental deaths did not punctuate every hour of the day, for all the New Cumberlanders had guns, and all carried them over the shoulder, loaded and at full cock, all day long, more for fear of each other than because of any fear of white people. . . . There had been a white-man or two accidentally winged; one killed, a year or two ago. Blackbury, then, had done his best to prevent the natives from carrying guns in the town, but with no law and no soldiers or police to back him, he had ignominiously failed.

The chief had some petition to make; some injustice suffered to tell about. He asked for Blackbury; was informed that the Commissioner was away, and further told that Gatehouse was chief in his stead.

The Secretary, new as he was to the islands, spoke the Meliasi tongue with wonderful fluency. He explained to the native that he was, as it were, king over Meliasi for the present; he would give judgment, settle disputes. . . . The chief, an islander from far out, heard with reverence, and bending

down, knocked his woolly head upon the steps of the verandah before he began his trifling tale. Gatehouse seemed to swell as he looked at the man.

If Blackbury, the Commissioner, had been anywhere within hearing, instead of half a day away, it is probable that the Secretary would have learned what it was to experience an official "wiggling" of the most forcible kind, for Gatehouse, in judging the case laid before him by the chief, did everything that he did not do when Blackbury was present, everything, almost, that Blackbury had specially warned him not to do. He represented "Beritania" as the one and only power in the islands, himself as exponent of that power. He promised large, illimitable things. . . . If the people of the hill villages had indeed come down and carried away the chief's best, newest wife; had made her a slave in the yam gardens, and refused, with threatenings and scorn, even to consider the question of damages as laid down by native custom—then, Gatehouse promised, compensation should be had, and he would bring it himself. But the chief was to be silent about the matter. It might be a little while before Beritania's great representative could get free from cares of state, and make the expedition required. If anything were known beforehand. . . .

The chief quite understood; he bowed his fuzzy head on his cocoanut-oiled breast, and humbly offered, as retaining fee, a thrice curled round white boar tusk, of worth untold. Gatehouse, again breaking through all Residency rules, accepted it, carelessly, as one who has no need of further treasure, and pointed to the steps, to mark the end of the audience.

But the chief had somewhat more to say. Savage

though he might be, he was a judge of character, and set down Gatehouse as a person to whom one might sell bits of exclusive information. He had picked up one, canoeing across from his island that morning.

"The fat lord has sent the thin one back," he blurted out, in his own tongue, watching Gatehouse's face. It showed him nothing. But the Secretary beckoned him farther into the verandah.

"Where did you see that?" he asked.

"Close to Koro. I know about the fight, and the other fight, the one they will make today. But the thin chief is not going. Lord, he never meant to go. He meant to go to some other place. And when they were far out behind the island, then the fat chief let him take the canoe, and he got out of the whaleboat and went."

Gatehouse kept his self-control, but could not hide the sparkle in his eyes.

"More," he said brusquely.

"I am hungry for tobacco," was the answer.

The Secretary tossed a handful of dark sticks on the floor. Picking them up unconcernedly with his toes, the native went on as if he had never stopped. "But I do not know where he went, for he turned into the great forest, where it is full of devils, and no one except the sorcerers dare to go."

"What part of the forest?" demanded Gatehouse.

"By the point next but two to Koro."

Gatehouse considered. He was quite as anxious as anyone else in the New Cumberlands to unearth the secret of Conn's mysterious riches, but he knew that there would be no use—less than no use—in attempting to follow him. It was best to store up the information, and utilize it later on.

He dismissed the chief, with a further present of

tobacco—it came to three-halfpence a stick, but was down in the entertainment accounts—and went into his own room, where something long and heavy lay wrapped up in folds of canvas. Disinterred, it proved to be a telescope of high power, with a collapsing stand. Gatehouse never used it except when he was alone; the Commissioner did not even know he possessed it. In truth, the Secretary was not minded to put it to official uses, and so destroy the exclusive prestige he reaped from certain mysterious discoveries and private stores of knowledge.

From his own room, with the telescope trained first on one island and then on another, he scoured the whole horizon. Distant hills, far-off shores, leaped into sudden prominence and nearness as he swept the fine instrument over them. No, there was nothing to be seen about the Koro neighbourhood; it was hopelessly shut off by a projecting mountain. Waka, the Mission island, showed up clear and daintily bright as a little painted toy. Wawaka, the pearlers' island, was half hidden behind Wawa, Conn's home. He noticed that the pearling boats were not out that morning, and wondered why. He looked again at Wawa, more carefully this time. The house, on the high pointed peak of the island, stood half in view, half hidden by flowering trees. There was something moving among those trees . . . surely. . . .

Only the great telescope could have done it; Blackbury's binoculars, fine as they were, would not have shown more than moving dots. But Gatehouse, adjusting the focus with care, saw more. He saw the figures of four men in khaki clothes, such as Fursey and his crowd were accustomed to wear, advancing carefully towards the house under the shade

of the trees. No doubt they thought themselves invisible; and they would have been under ordinary circumstances, to anything in the harbour or beyond it.

Gatehouse raised the telescope, and began sweeping the waters behind Wawa, without any very definite object. It was nothing to him if Conn's place was looted. Less than nothing. He did not like the man. He wondered what the girl was like—the woman, rather—who had had that odd adventure. He pondered over the name, biting his sharp moustache, and thinking hard. His thinking did not seem to come to any definite conclusion; a puzzled look came, and remained, until it was chased out by the sight of something that crept, slowly, almost imperceptibly, across the field of the lens that he was still looking through.

It was a small figure in a canoe; a woman in dark clothes. It came from the Mission island, and it was—undoubtedly—heading for the landing-place at Wawa.

Gatehouse looked again, to make sure—although he was sure enough as it was—and then, carefully, but with all possible swiftness, dismantled the telescope, rolled it up, and dropped it behind a rampart of cabin trunks. He took his sun helmet off the verandah wall as he went out, and put it on his head as he ran down the track that led to the beach. The canoe boy heard him calling sharply and was up and out of his palm-leaf shelter by the waves, before the "white lord" had come into view. . . .

Gatehouse ran out of the shelter of the wooded track, as the boy was dragging down the canoe that served for occasional use, in the absence of the official boat. He called for the second canoe boy, still

dozing over betelnut and lime gourd in the shelter of the hut. It seemed that there was hard paddling to be done. . . .

There was. The boys were winded before they were half-way to the nearest island, but Gatehouse, seizing a spare paddle himself, drove it deep in the water, and made the foam spurt up about the blade, shouting the while to the natives to keep them hard at work.

So, splashing and driving, they went across the bay.

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE Deirdre, as she went, opened out the wonderful reaches of Meliasi harbour. She watched them, enjoying the insolent splendour of the greens and blues, the far-flung defiance of the unexplored black hills that lay beyond. She thought, as the canoe slipped over, rather than through, those warm, light-rippling waters where no cold wind, no bitter rains of winter, came from century to century, that it was strange she should have a mind enough at ease to enjoy the beauty of the place and the day. For things had gone badly with Deirdre.

The Mission people had received her kindly enough; her letters of introduction were satisfactory, and her willingness to pay for her board even more so. They were not rich, these mission folk of the New Cumberlands, and they had been taken in more than once by loafers and beach combers, dear to keep and hard to get rid of. So that, for the first day or two, she was a welcome guest.

Deirdre herself had stayed so often in Mission houses that they were old ground to her. She liked them on the whole. She liked the atmosphere of quiet and peace, of remoteness from trading or political affairs. She liked the neat bright native pupils, male and female, who ran about doing ready service in the houses, or accompanying visitors on their walks. She was simple-minded enough to find pleasure in the religious services, of any and every

kind, and to enjoy the inspection of native schools, the going over of copybooks and looking at prize exercises, that were an inevitable part of each visit. Always, she had been liked at Mission houses, had been pressed to come again, to stay as long as she chose. . . .

Whereas, the missionaries of Meliasi had all but turned her out.

It had been well with her, till the news of her mistake in landing on Wawa instead of Waka Island had crept across from Meliasi town. Then, the wife of the chief missionary, a Lady Paramount in the little community of Waka, had come to her with cold eyes and stiff manner, and asked if indeed it were true that she had gone to Mr. Conn's place, on arrival, and had stayed there, unchaperoned, till next day. Deirdre replied promptly that it was true, and had explained the circumstances, expecting to see a light of comprehension dawn over the face of Mrs. Saul, and to be told that it was all quite right. In fact, she thought the reverend lady (it was impossible to think of Mrs. Saul without that adjective) would make her something like an apology.

But her tale was received in silence—dead silence—silence that grew more dead with every moment it lasted. Mrs. Saul looked at her, and if ever a look directed by one woman at another said, "I do not believe you," Mrs. Saul's look said that and nothing else.

The truth was that Mrs. Saul had not much approved of Deirdre from the first. She was too pretty, for one thing. Mrs. Saul considered prettiness that passed a certain point to verge on the indelicate; and she felt that the point was passed, and overpassed, by Deirdre.

Then Mrs. Saul had heard Deirdre's songs, and thought them—especially "Your Shadow On My Heart"—"not altogether nice." Mrs. Saul belonged to the second of the two classes into which missionary wives may be grouped—the first being the pretty girl whom the missionary has picked up on furlough, and the second the virgin of medium attractions, whom he has wedded "on the field." She believed in what she called "sensible" love. The sort of thing described in Deirdre's songs was not sensible. She would not have liked to say what it was. But a girl who could write songs like that was not the sort of girl to whom one could readily pardon any escapades in bachelors' houses. One could not, of course, in a place like Meliasi, turn the girl out. But one could walk away without answering what one felt to be a lying tale, and one could later on in the day, mention, pointedly, the date of the next steamer. That would surely be comprehensible.

It was. Deirdre comprehended very clearly indeed. And, while the unpleasant and choking meal that followed was in progress, she had time to remember that the Mission canoe was on the beach, and that any one of the merry black boys and girls would be only too glad to take her on a surreptitious voyage of discovery. They were not allowed to leave the island, but Deirdre did not feel like considering that overmuch. Nor did she feel like giving in to the prejudices of the reverend lady, with regard to bachelors and their establishments. In calmer moments, she was all for Mrs. Grundy herself, but it is women like the Reverend Mrs. Saul who tear Mrs. Grundy's sceptre from her hand, when all is said and done, far more than those who label themselves "unconventional."

At this moment, it seemed to Deirdre that all proper people—especially all very proper people—were in the last degree abominable. She was in the mood, as she put it to herself, to “give them something to cry for.” And towards this end, she kidnapped a very willing native lad, also the canoe, and set forth to Wawa Island. She would go up there and make a morning call on Mr. Conn, and hang Mrs. Grundy! There was no Mrs. Grundy in the New Cumberlands anyhow, outside of Waka. She would get him to find out for her where she could go, in Meliasi town—there was sure to be some place or other—and she would take her goods away from Waka, and get to the mainland township, that very night.

The sense of freedom and escape upheld her, as she went across the bay. She had been somewhat stifled in the Mission after all—she, Deirdre, the wanderer, with the never resting foot, and the heart that drove her always on and on. Through her mind, while the paddle dipped and dripped, ran the lines from “Ulysses” that every wanderer knows—

“Much have I seen
Of cities, councils, climates, Governments. . . .
I am become a name
For ever roaming with a hungry heart.”

A schooner, near Meliasi wharf, had finished unloading, and was spreading her tall, triangular sails to the beckoning trade-wind. Deirdre, in the stern of the canoe, murmured to herself, half singing—one could so easily set it to a song—

“There lies the port, the vessel puffs her sail,
There gloom the dark broad seas, my mariners!”

One of the spells that held her heart in fee was that last line. She never murmured it to herself without feeling a shudder of strange delight creep down her spine and crisp her skin, as if cool water had suddenly flowed on her. She supposed that no one else in the world felt as she felt, about these scraps, half lines, these single words that could lift one to such a curious state of ecstasy. Yet she wondered if it were possible that anyone else shared her folly.

"Adrian thought it silly," she remembered. "I wonder—there might be—somewhere or other—some man who wouldn't. These things are bigger than they seem. If one knew someone who would explain them. . . . But if one did, one might like him too well."

And the sum of her thought, as she sprang out of the canoe on the white beach of Wawa, was "God keep me from knowing such a man."

In which she was not more illogical—if you come to think of it—than you, or than I.

It was a short journey up to the top of the island today. She could not help laughing at the thought of the evening—so recent, yet so far past—when she had taken this place for Waka. Waka! with the riot of luxury, the delight in beautiful things that cried out at every step of the road! No—the Reverend Mrs. Saul not to speak of that worthy and pious man, her husband, could never have had a hand in the making of Wawa. That there was something in it all akin to her own nature, Deirdre felt today, more clearly than she had felt it on her first visit to the island. Wawa and its hanging terraces of flowers, its winding steps that gave you glimpses of magical blue lakes of sea, its drinking fountain that

chattered, solitary, to the wheeling sun, was after her very heart.

She topped the rise, light-footed, and saw the white concrete house upon its plateau. The grille was shut. A pang of disappointment shot through her. Why had she not considered that Conn might be away?

Then she noticed something further—a step-ladder, set astride the spiked iron railing that surmounted the height of the gate.

It puzzled her at first, without alarming her. She supposed that some one of the native servants must have adopted this means of getting into the house, in his master's absence. Deirdre, as an experienced island traveller, knew well the thieving habits of dark-skinned house and cook boys.

All the housewife in her awoke.

"They'll take his tea and sugar and meat," she said to herself. "They'll have a couple of tins of kerosene away into the villages before he comes back. What a shame!"

She stood and looked at the ladder. It was a double step-ladder; nothing could be easier than to mount it, cross the locked gate, and find the thieves at work. Yet somehow, she hesitated. . . .

. . . A long way off, near the point of land that ran into the sea beside Koro, Conn was just getting over the gunwale of the Commissioner's big whale-boat into a tiny canoe. He seemed to act with somewhat less than his usual crisp decision of manner. Sitting on the gunwale, with the "dug-out" swaying beneath his feet, he half hung back.

"I don't know that I oughtn't to go on with you, sir," he was saying.

"What's the use?" answered Blackbury. "Of

course I may as well visit Koro now I'm here, but the whole thing has petered out since we heard the fellow's alive after all. I might have burned a village or two for killing a white man, but there's no sense in doing it because somebody gave a clip on the head—likely he deserved it—that laid him out for a day. If I had a proper code of laws, and proper powers of administration—but there, it's no use talking about that. Anyhow, if you want to look up the villages, there's nothing on earth to prevent you doing it."

"I know," said Conn, still hesitating, "but I shan't get home quickly. If I kept with you, I'd be back tonight."

"Any reason for wanting to be back?"

Conn hesitated. "I suppose there's none," he said. He did not like to mention the curious fear that had taken hold of him, of things being just now wrong, very wrong, at home. How could they be wrong? Even if something had happened to his house, he knew what he knew; he wished any meddlers joy of what they'd get. No, nothing could be wrong. It must be a touch of fever—or of sun.

"No reason," he produced at last. "I'll go on."

Long after he was ashore, tramping through the dusk of the great forest on an errand known only to himself, the uneasiness followed him. Conn was a Celt; clairvoyance and second-sight were more than mere words to him. He could not go back; the nature of his errand forbade it. But he resolved to spend no more than the one necessary night away. With dawn, he would be on the road back to Wawa, as quick as boats, canoes, and his own quick feet could carry him.

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Deirdre, standing alone in the sun and the warm wind, on the peak of Wawa Island, felt curiously lonely. The big white house, deserted and locked, rose up before her like a visible reminder of her disappointment. She knew now that she was disappointed—amazingly so—at not finding Conn in his home. What was she going to do?

Well, one thing she certainly would do, before she went over to the town or back to the Mission. She would get over the wall and catch those thieves at their work. The solidarity of race, felt by all Europeans who live among dark people, forbade her to go away and leave the natives destroying a white man's property.

It was easy to get over the wall. She was up and down, and safely landed on the paving inside in a few seconds. There was nobody in the courtyard; nobody on the shaded pillared verandahs, where bougainvillæa, bishop-purple, hung out gorgeous tapestries to the ruffling of the wind. Deirdre was wearing the rubber-soled shoes that are commonly used in the islands; her feet made no noise as she passed from room to room. At first she heard nothing. The house seemed as quiet and deserted as on the evening when she had come up from the steamer, and made herself a prisoner in the box. . . .

What was that? People talking? She thought so. But it was low, murmured speech; one could not catch any words. Were the tones native? Hard to be sure. She almost thought they were not—but that was impossible. . . . She followed the sound, stepping noiselessly in her rubber-soled shoes, straining forward to hear.

A door was open—a door that had been shut when

she was there before. In the lock—she could see, craning round the corner of the verandah—hung a bunch of odd-looking spikey keys. From the room inside came the voices she had heard. And now she was sure they were not native. For she could hear the words—a confused babbling of low-toned talk, two or three people together.

“. . . can fix it up as if it had never been opened; what do you take me for? Only a common sort of safe at . . . marks on the goods show he's found a market of his own; who ever heard of tommy'awks at such a price, and they're steel, too, not cast . . . to hell with those beads, the safe is littered up with them—chuck them—the nuggets tell the tale; I always said it was gold.”

Completely, in an instant, she understood. Somebody had broken into the house in Conn's absence, and was looting his goods.

She had felt equal to confronting any number of native thieves, but this was another matter. Conn must protect himself against whites; she was almost certain it was the inhabitants of Wawaka who were at work in there, and she had no desire at all to make their acquaintance after such a fashion; or indeed after any fashion at all. The thing was to get away, to do it as quickly as possible, and to do it without being heard.

Soundlessly, tiptoeing over the paved verandah floor, she crept out towards the gate. She had her foot on the ladder; another minute and she would have been safe over the gate. But in that minute she had been perceived by Conn's great white cockatoo, that lived partly on his roof and partly in the surrounding bush. It had been already much perturbed by the invasion of strange people. One

more stranger was the last straw. The cockatoo flopped down from its perch on the fountain basin, where it had been dancing uneasily for some time; half ran, half flew across the patio, and launched itself, with crest erect and flapping wings, straight at Deirdre. And it screamed, meanwhile, as only a cockatoo, alarmed, can scream.

Deirdre had no desire to receive the assault of the furious bird. She parried it as well as she could with her sunshade, backing away as she did so. In the hurry of the moment, she did not note where she was going; and so it happened that she backed right on to a table set in a recess of the verandah, and laid with cups and saucers, ready for Conn's return. It went over with a crash, scattering the china all over the paved floor. The cockatoo, alarmed at the disaster, which it instantly credited to itself, fled back to the fountain, pathetically crying, "Mother, mother, mother!"

Deirdre stood dumbfounded for a moment. Then things began to happen. Out of the room with the dangling bunch of keys bolted four men. One was very tall, one short and chunky, two undistinguished. They seemed in a tremendous hurry, but when they saw her, they all stopped short, and for a moment, the whole party fell into something resembling the stillness-in-action of one of the stereograph pictures that had delighted Deirdre's youth. Long after, it remained stamped upon her mind—the white pavement of the verandah, the tapestried bougainvillæa throwing purple shadows, the tall man with the dead, queer face looking at her as if she were a spectre, and as if he didn't mind a bit; the short chunky man, who struck her as being appallingly vulgar—she did not know why—holding his hat in one hand, and

striking an attitude of gallant admiration strangely mingled with the air of a child who has been caught at a jam-pot. What she could not see was herself, a slim, bright-haired figure in vaporous black, set, with amazingly brilliant effect, in the westering sun and the sunlit, puce-purple flowers.

The picture broke. The chunky man came forward, and with a smile that was mild, obliging, even innocent, introduced himself and his friends.

"Miss Rogers, I presume," he said. "Allow me to make you acquainted with Mr. Child, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Mac. It isn't any of their names, but perhaps Miss Rogers isn't yours either."

Deirdre flushed almost as red as the bougainvillæas. How had this little scoundrel—for she guessed without difficulty that the name of the man himself was Fursey—managed to hit the mark with his random arrow so easily?

There was nothing mysterious about it, if she had known. Fursey, a consummate judge of all that was bad or doubtful in human nature, had set her down at once as too good looking to have reached the latter twenties unsweethearted; as too young to be roaming the world alone and unprotected, unless she had forfeited, in some manner or other, the countenance of her friends. He saw the shot go home, and giggled, under his preposterous red moustache. When Fursey giggled, his intimates were apt to take in sail; squalls, gales and water spouts had been known to follow such bursts of untimely sun.

Deirdre did not know this, but she did not like the giggle. It suddenly occurred to her that the top of Wawa Island, in the wild New Cumberlands, was a long, a very long way from safety and civilization.

Beginning to be frightened, she still kept her head, outwardly, and decided that it was best to speak as if the encounter were quite an ordinary one. She was not bound to know what the men had been up to. The less they thought she knew, the better, no doubt, it would be for her.

"Perhaps," she said, with a white little smile, "I'm better known as Deirdre; I write songs, you know."

Over the face of the chunky man came an expression of interest.

"Do you?" he said, and swore an oath that made Deirdre wonder whether she had dreamt it—it seemed impossible that anyone out of a nightmare should say such things, and say them, moreover, with a smiling, almost a gratified face. "Do you, then ———, ———, ———. You shall sing them to me, you shall, my pretty little lady." And he sealed the pronouncement with another of those rattling blasts.

"I am in hell," said Deirdre's mind to her. "People could not say such things out of hell." She kept tight hold of the handle of her parasol. It seemed that if she did not keep hold of something, she would faint.

"Well," said Fursey, twisting his moustache in a way that made her think of a cat washing its face, "there's a good sort of a piano in there. I'm fond of music. If I ain't—" He said what might happen to him if he was not.

All this time, the dead-alive looking man whom Fursey had called Child stood looking at them, and not seeing them. But for some unknown reason, he suddenly bestirred himself now. Mac and Smith, two unshaven, weak-chinned fellows in dirty white

clothes, leaned up against the wall and watched. Child took a step forwards.

"Let her alone," he said.

"Who are you?" asked Fursey, beginning to giggle again.

Deirdre saw the two men in the background suddenly straighten up, and begin to watch, with a vivid interest, that she did not, somehow like.

"Let her alone."

"Who are you?" asked Fursey for the second time, and he was not giggling now. "What are you?"

It was a simple question, but it might have been a bullying address ten minutes long, for the effect that it had on Child. He crumpled up, almost physically. One hand, that he had raised and clenched, sank to his side. His eyes lost the half light that had crept into them. He was once more a corpse.

The other men relaxed their attention. It seemed to Deirdre that they were mysteriously disappointed.

"Here," said Fursey, the unmistakable note of authority in his voice. "Take this key; it'll open Conn's cellar room. Go and make your damned selves happy."

"What about the safe?" asked the man called Smith, nervously.

"We've been had there. Had—H-A-D. Wherever it is, it isn't there. And that's something to know. So go and make beasts of yourselves. As for me, the lady and I are going to be refined and sit in the drawing room, and have a little music." He laid a hand on Deirdre's shoulder. Light as the touch was, it propelled like a touch from the buffer of a railway engine. With whirling mind, the girl

felt herself swept along the verandah, and in at the drawing-room door, hardly knowing how the thing had come about. Furseley had not been violent; he had scarcely touched her. But there she was, and there was he, spread out in the biggest of the arm-chairs, a cigar in one hand and a match in the other.

"Go to the piano—please be so kind as to go to the piano," he said, with the giggle beginning to work again. "Play me and sing me your songs. I'd like to know if you've been lying. I don't think any the less of a little lady for lying, mind you; they all do it—but it amuses me to know. Did you ever read of Scheherazade?"

"Yes," answered Deirdre, still wondering if the whole mad scene were not a dream, and at the same time, wishing madly that Conn would but come back. "Come back, come back!" she called him, wordlessly.

And at that moment, Conn, with his leg over the gunwale of the whaleboat, ready to disembark, drew back and hesitated . . . and went on.

"Well," said Furseley, lighting his cigar, "you remember that she had to keep the king amused as long as he chose, and when she stopped, he cut off her head. Or meant to. It's all the same. Go on, little lady, let's hear you. I am a musician, I am. I'm an artist—a man of feeling. If I'm not—" and then came the string of blasphemy again. "So long as you keep me amused, you can keep your little head on your shoulders. Off with you."

To the end of her life, Deirdre never forget that scene.

Furseley had drunk as much as was good for him, before starting out from his island, and it had scarcely had time to wear off. A tantalus and syphon

of Conn's, standing on a side table, supplied him with the means of keeping himself—what he would have called—up to the mark. There were more marks than one, in the little scoundrel's method of intoxication. The first kept him normal, free from the "blues" and ill tempers that are the lot of the drinking man deprived of drink. The second made him cheerful, the next freakish and inclined to tyrannize. He did not become quarrelsome till the fourth stage, or murderous till the fifth. Deirdre could not guess all this, but some instinct told her to keep him interested and amused. The better he was pleased, the fewer glasses of whisky would go down that wolf's throat of his, under the grinning red moustache. The fewer glasses passed that way, the more chance she had of tiding things over till Conn came back. He would come back that night—that afternoon. He must!

In the years that intervened between Teneriffe, Adrian Shaw, and Tahiti, Deirdre's talent had had full scope. She had written song after song, some famous, sung to death, like "Gypsy Lover," and "My Love Has Wedded the Sea-Wind," others cared for chiefly by musicians, like "Your Shadow On My Heart," and "Home, Home to You." There were yet more, dainty, pretty little songs that had somehow failed to catch the public as a whole, and that sold only by twos and threes. Some of the best music was included among these; she knew them all by heart, and liked them, perhaps, better than the rest. The whole tale ran to dozens, and every one of them, from first to last, Fursey made her sing.

Hour by hour, as the sun climbed down the maple-wood panelling of the drawing room, lit green and violet fires in the crystal of the chandelier, crept

lower to lay long stitching and darning of gold in the sombre, handsome covers of sofas and chairs, touched the floor at last, and split the parquetting with a burst of light, as if strange fires were breaking up from underneath—did Deirdre play, and sing, and sing. Her voice was a natural one, trained by teachers who knew their work, and had not spoilt its light facility of production—otherwise she had broken down early in the trial. She was proof against any common strain, as an opera singer accustomed to long nights of vocal exercise might have been proof. But this was more than a common strain. Not even in opera does a singer go on without break, without rest, thousands and thousands of notes following one another. There are pauses, intervals; other singers hold the stage; the curtain goes down for the next act. No curtain dropped for Deirdre; the little scoundrel in the satin chair lolled, put up his boots on the table at his side, smoked and smoked, and drank steadily down the tantalus bottle; and all the time he kept her hard at work.

She sang "Your Shadow On My Heart." She sang "Gypsy Lover." She sang "Home, Home to You." She sang them again and a third time, and a fourth. She sang other songs, and repeated them when told. As Fursey grew more drunk, he ceased to demand repetitions, he wanted new songs all the time. And she sang them. Her fingers seemed almost paralyzed at times, the notes died away in her throat, and only came back when she forced them. The pedals, under her feet, grew stiff; the music stool tortured her unsupported back. She sang on. The only thing in the world she feared was stopping.

Fursey knew she was tired; it amused him exceedingly. He was in the mood that the American cow-

boy of long ago used to be in, when he made inoffensive strangers dance to the shots of his pistol, directed at their feet. Fursey would not shoot at a woman; he would not—usually—strike one. But it delighted him to keep Deirdre on the music stool, singing. If she had fallen off in a dead faint, he would have laughed himself sick.

Besides—of such strange elements are we compounded—he really liked the music very much, and wanted it to go on. If he had had a phonograph—but this was before the day of the universal talking machine—he would have done as many men in the islands do to-day; kept it going all day and half the night. This was a human phonograph. He kept it at work; sucked Conn's cigars, drank his whisky, and enjoyed himself.

The sun was getting low. Deirdre, swallowing in a throat as dry as the sands of Meliasi beach, wondered how much longer she could go on; how many more minutes, hours, years, this horrible dream would last. She could scarcely conceive it anything but a dream. She did not dare to look at Fursey and the whisky bottle, though she was almost certain he had finished it, and started on the second. His voice was changing, had changed; it was no longer the affectedly soft and civil tone he had chosen to use at first, but a rough-edged snarl, that cut her quivering nerves every time she heard it. And she was beginning to hear it often. "More new ones," he yelled at her, swinging his glass so that it spouted whisky over Conn's fine Manahiki mats. "Find one I haven't heard before, you blessed Sherry—Sherryzaza—or I'll have your blessed head." He banged with his glass on the table, and swore again, that rattling blast of oaths, more terrifying than

any crash of heaven's thunder. "You're singing lazy," he yelled. "Sing up, curse you."

Suddenly, as she sang, with her tired voice, the last song that she could remember—a boat song that had in its swinging cadences the magic of lagoons swept by flying paddle blades, of stars awash among the foam—there came to the girl one of those inspirations that come, flash quick, to creatures driven hard. Her many ancestresses and their million experiences, adventures, disasters, whispered as one woman in her ear—"Now is the moment; now, while he is unsteady and before he drinks himself mad. You are between him and the door. Bolt. There may be a chance."

Without waiting to finish the song, without an instant's hesitation, she snatched her hands from the keys, and leaped through the doorway. Fursey, bemused with drink, did not, for a moment, realize what had happened, and in that moment, she had gained start enough to put the verandah and the courtyard between them. She was half-way up the ladder when she heard him stamping after her, in a deadly silence more alarming than any of the furious noises she had expected to hear. It seemed he was not too drunk to run, nor yet to climb, for his feet shook the step-ladder on the inner side just as she was flinging herself down the outer run of steps. She pitched almost on her face as she landed, recovered, and ran straight into the arms of a man who was coming up from the beach stairway. It seemed that the concussion hurt him, for he instantly put out a handkerchief, and put it to his face, speaking to her indistinctly through the folds.

"Go down the steps," he said, "I'll tackle him." She did not pause to see how the tackling was done.

Nor did she go all the way down the concrete flight that led to the sea. With the cunning of the weak, hunted animal, she turned aside half-way down, and crept into a clump of scarlet flowering hibiscus trees. They had been pruned; they stood dense and low, and made a perfect hiding place. On her knees, she shook and panted, growing gradually quieter, and looking all the time through the chinks among the leaves to see what was going to happen. She wondered who the man with the handkerchief might be.

"Some one of the planters, coming up to see him," she thought, and did not know how much that bare, lone pronoun told. . . .

Whatever she had expected to happen, it was not what did happen—a long, droning call from one of the shell trumpets common in the islands, repeated once and twice, three times in all—then a series of short, sharp blasts; seven of them. And then, so quickly that she scarce had time to draw back, came down the beach stairway Fursey and the man called Child, and the two indeterminate, dirty men, and, some way in their rear, the man with the handkerchief. It was not held to his face now; he had it in his hand; but he was looking sidewise as he came out over the harbour, where a whaleboat, manned by twelve natives, was creeping like a many-legged water-beetle over the sunset-gilded sea to Meliasi; so Deirdre, crouching among the hibiscus stems, could not see his face. Before she could decide what to do, he had gone on down the staircase, and the place had become utterly, strangely silent. One could hear the locusts clicketing in the grass; huge, emerald-armored beetles droning, a faint, far breath from spent waves falling on the beach. No more.

When she decided to creep forth from her hiding

place, and go down the stairway—cautiously watching the pathway and the sea as she went—she found—the island desolate. The whaleboat she had noticed while she knelt among the trees had crept its way to Meliasi, and was turning round the corner of the Residency island. There was a sloop, one of the pearling boats, just swinging up into the wind, leaning lightly, with the incomparable grace of those small island crafts, from the lessened urge of the south-easter that was dying now with the fading of the day. Deirdre had sharp eyes; she could see that the sloop held four white men. It was running, as hard as the lightness of the wind allowed, upon the course just traversed by the whaleboat.

She had recovered her nerve, almost, by now. She drank at the little spring, dipped her handkerchief in the stone basin, and put a cold compress round her throat. "Perhaps I shall have a quinsy or something," she thought. "It's not the fault of that brute, brute, brute, if I don't. Why didn't *he* come home? They call him the Hundred Fighter. He would have killed that jumpy little fiend. Thank God I got away." She sat down on the edge of the fountain, and comforted herself with a few tears.

Oddly, she gave very little thought to the man who had come up the stairway just in time. She only wondered what he had done to set the whole crowd running as he did. The motive must have been a powerful one indeed, that snatched Fursey from his pursuit of herself, and the other men from their onslaught upon Conn's cellar. She remembered now—though she had not been conscious of it at the time—that all the men came down the staircase with wet heads and faces. They must have been sobering

themselves by throwing water on one another. She had seen it done in Tahiti.

"When the Commissioner gets to hear of it, he'll arrest—" she thought, and then broke off. "Why, he can't," she said wonderingly. "There's no law in the New Cumberlands." It came upon her with curious force, that absence of law. She had not fully realized it at first. Tahiti was spoken of as a "lawless" place. So was Colon. But they had police; they had gaols, the machinery might be rusty, but it was there, and could be used. Here, about Meliasi, one man could loot another's house, could behave to her as those men had behaved today—could, indeed, do infinitely worse—and there was nothing whatever that might be done to them, unless the always hoped-for, never-arriving man-of-war came along, and simply deported them by force of arms.

"Well," argued the gypsy in Deirdre's wandering soul, "it's something to have seen a place like that."

The Mission lad was lounging on the beach when she got down. He spoke amazingly good English; he was ready with his comments, at once, on so much of the recent affray as he understood.

"I hope, miss," he said, scratching his woolly scalp, "that those rough men have not annoyed you. I not know they on the island. They are bad men without the truth of the Gospel in them. You have stick of tobacco for me, miss?"

Deirdre had; she carried a bag of that island small coin wherever she went. She tipped the boy, and asked him whether he could paddle her across to the mainland. She had heard that there was a decent married trader living opposite Meliasi, on

the great island that gave the town its name. She would try and get taken in over there. It was said that the mainland was not so safe as the various islands about the harbour, where most of the white people made their homes, but Deirdre was in no mood to appreciate the safety of the harbour islands that day, nor the advantage of having white neighbours. She asked the boy a question or two about the trader.

"I think, miss," he said, "maybe it better you go and stay with Misser Blackbird."

"I'm going to the trader's, so you had better take me, if you want tobacco," she answered.

"Yes, miss, I want tobacco," he cried. "The Mission say it filthy weed, but my stomach all the time loves him. You will give me plenty?"

"Ten sticks."

The boy's eyes glistened.

"The Lord will reward you, miss, and I will take you wherever you like," he answered piously. Then, helping her into the canoe, "miss, I have seen the ungodly men going away very quick. I have hear the trumpet shell, three time, seven time!"

"What about? My good boy, I'll ask you to hurry up a bit; it will be dark in half an hour."

"I get you there quick, miss, I am very good paddler. Miss, you know that when they blow like that, it is some one of the natives have seen Misser Conn he go after his gold?"

"No! How? Tell me about that."

"Miss," went on the boy, paddling hard, and evidently pleased by the interest he had excited, "all the native, the pearling men give him tobacco, if he blow the trump when he sees Misser Conn going away into the bush. Some native been blowing the

trump on the mainlan', another hear him on Wawa Island, he blow too. Both them, they get tobacco."

"And all the pearling men went off to chase?"

"Yes, miss, they have gone very quick, because they wish to catch Misser Conn."

"Mr. Conn is over on the mainland, then?"

"Yes, miss, he went over to the mainlan' with Misser Blackbird this morning, miss, and Misser Blackbird he has come back, but not Misser Conn."

The canoe slipped on across the strait. Deirdre wondered if she were going to live in canoes for the future. It seemed that all events and errands in the New Cumberlands were inextricably entangled with canoes. She wondered, too, if one might chance to see—but that was impossible. If Conn had indeed gone over to see about his mysterious treasure, he would not be found walking anywhere in public.

The boy landed her, received his reward of tobacco, and paddled hurriedly away. It was sunset now, as on the evening, not very long ago, when she had landed upon Wawa Island, and seen the mainland lying opposite. Dark woods, long shore growing ivory-grey in twilight, sea turning citron-green as the light went down; the wind getting up, and blowing cocoanut husk, palm fronds, small tinkling twigs of coral along the empty sands—all was the same. Yet not the same; the spirit of the Western Islands, distantly hovering then, was now as near at hand as a vulture planing over its prey. The forest impended, cruel, grim, saying almost aloud the untellable things that are hinted at in nightmares—the loneliness of the beach, unlike any loneliness she had ever heard or dreamed of, seared her mind as the touch of frozen steel sears the flesh.

She had to walk along the full length of the beach before finding the road that led to the trader's. She wondered a little why she was not more frightened. The New Cumberlands were not the safest place in the world, in broad daylight, with an armed escort. And here she was, an unarmed girl, wandering alone upon a nightmare sort of a beach, with wild cannibals about in the bush, and not even the certainty of a roof for her head that night. And she had just escaped being captured by Fursey and his crew. She ought, she reflected, to have been lying on her bed in a darkened room, staving off an attack of nervous breakdown. Whereas, she felt only a little tired and a little hungry.

"I suppose," she mused, "it's because I have no house and no bed to go to. When you mustn't break down, you don't. I suppose I am horribly frightened, inside, if I let myself believe it. Those devil-bird things are enough to scare one by themselves. But I can't afford to let them."

Out of the black forest, as she toiled along the strand, had come, at sunset, numberless dark, winged, silent things that dipped and fluttered horribly close round her head. She struck at them with a leaf of palm, but they came, more and more, circling, skimming, almost brushing her with their soundless wings, as they took bearings for a flight away to sea. She knew they were only bats, but never, in any of the Eastern Pacific groups, had she seen such monsters, or known the brutes so fearless. Their green eyes showed like little flames about her, their teeth glinted white in the last of the mirrored afterglow. Their wings stretched wide as those of the albatrosses that had followed Deirdre's ship, far south in New Zealand seas. There was some-

thing intimate, hateful, knowing, about them in their duskiness and silence, that made them like a daring sin.

Deirdre did not like them; she began to run presently, and broke, scarce seeing where she went, into the open sandy road at the end of the beach. The lagoon threw up enough reflected light for her to see where she was. She ran, and beat about her with her hands. Suddenly the black wings disappeared; the fluttering ceased. They were gone. She stopped at once, out of breath, and panting vaguely to herself, "Thank Heaven the brutes are—"

Her sentence ended in a cry.

"Oh! they aren't!"

She had come, somehow or other—she did not know how—into an open alley with a pale light upon it from the rising moon. Along the sides of the alley stood dark structures, evenly spaced apart, and resembling very tall, very narrow sentry-boxes. On the top of each black sentry-box sat, with immense brooding wings outspread, one of the giant bats. So much she could see, in the dim but growing light. She could not tell why the creatures sat so still, nor why there was one on the top of every box, nor what the boxes might be.

"This is certainly a dream," she thought. "I wonder have I been dreaming all along? Things in these islands don't seem very real. What if I woke up in Tahiti, or Santa Cruz, after one of those hot nights, when there's a trumpet-flower outside your window, and the scent is far too strong, and you are restless, and the moon shines in and you dream, oh, but dream! Perhaps if I gave a big jump I should fall right out of bed."

But she did not jump. It seemed impossible to

move, in this mysterious dim alley with the strange shapes standing on either side, until the moon came up. She knew it was coming; the moonrise wind was stealing through the trees.

In a little while, she, watching, saw the wall of low forest slowly spangle itself with silver; saw silver rays grow up, like magic leaves, among the roots of the trees, silver water come streaming through their branches. Then, swiftly, as if some hidden company of arches had drawn bow, a flight of silver arrows fell upon the rank of dark figures that faced eastward, and instantly they were photographed, black and white, upon the night. And Deirdre saw that the bats were not bats, or living things of any kind. They were carved images of huge dark birds, brooding with wings outspread and heads bent down, each above a shrine. And inside the shrines were figures, the like of which she had never seen in all the days of her wanderings. They were carved out of wood, and were about the size of dwarfish human beings. Each of them had a different face, and all the faces were devilish. Some snarled, some frowned, some put out long tongues, some glared with hideous eyes of mother-o'-pearl; a few—and those were the worst—laughed. She felt she could stand any of them but the laughing ones. . . . Over the head of each, on the peaked roof of its shrine, brooded, with wings outspread and wicked beak bent downward, one of the nightmare birds. Deirdre could see now that the spirit of the bats was in those creatures; less in form than in attitude, and in masterly suggestion of some hidden, nameless ill.

The moon rose higher. She could see the middle of the alley now, and a widely spaced row of stones

that ran down it; black stones, large, and shaped like anvils. They shone a little in the moon, as if they had been slightly greased. She did not know what they were, but she liked them not at all, nor did she like the way in which the grinning figures had been placed, one opposite each stone. It was almost as if the hideous things had some secret source of amusement connected with those stones; as if their terrible smiles had not been carved on their faces by the hand of man, but had grown there, as the slow result of that which they had looked on year by year and generation by generation. For they were old; the feet were rotting away with rain, and the edges of the shrines weathered to a fungus-grey. But the clear weedless spaces, and the earth about the stones, trampled hard as brick, showed that their use, whatever it might be, was not of the past. Light, reflected from the ground, showed enough of the western side of this strange avenue to suggest that a similar row of carved figures guarded it there also. Deirdre was glad she could not see their faces; she felt that one side of the place was as much as she could endure at once.

This, it was certain, could not be the road to the trader's. Probably she had missed it running away from the bats. If she went back again to the beach, she would no doubt find it; the boy had said it could not be mistaken. And anyhow, if she stayed another minute in this inferno, she would certainly go out of her mind.

Something—she could not have told what—prompted her to slip behind the row of figures, and walk down the avenue thus hidden. She had scarcely reached the end when she had cause to be thankful for the impulse. The road she had missed ran at

right angles across the avenue. A figure came soundlessly along it as she was about to pass out.

It was a native, naked, save for a boar's tusk hung on his dark oily chest, and a pig's tail threaded through each ear. He had the inevitable loaded gun on his shoulder; his right arm, curved, supported it by the barrel. His left arm hung down, and he was carelessly swinging something by his hand, as he walked. Deirdre took it to be a pumpkin, at first. But the man came on into a patch of moonlight, and she saw, as he crossed it, that he was carrying a woolly bleeding head.

She turned as cold as the night was hot, and drew farther back behind the tall shrine with the bird on top of it. Would the man see her? And would he want her head if he did? Deirdre was no "tenderfoot" in island life, though she had not visited a cannibal group before. Talk about the wild Western Islands flows over the Pacific in a stream of scandal and terror. She had heard much about the Solomons, the New Cumberlands, New Guinea; she knew that the head-hunter is not always hunting heads, and that it is quite possible he may have no desire whatever to acquire yours. Still—one does not take such chances lightly. She hoped he would not come down the avenue, but unless he were bound for the trader's, he would have to take it; there was no other road. She watched him anxiously as he came abreast of the opening.

What he did was not what she had expected. He drew aside as far as possible from the moonlit space bordered by the birds and the shrined figures; and passed it by in a curious attitude, expressive of reverence mixed with horror. His back was bent and his hands spread out, the gun, meantime, being

cleverly balanced on his shoulder. When he had thus gone crouching past, he straightened himself, took his gun in his hand again, and turned sharply off into the forest, where he could be heard for some time cautiously breaking his way through brush and leaves. The sound grew fainter, and died. Deirdre waited till all seemed safe and quiet, and then came out.

"How odd," she breathed. "Why, he went right through rather than walk down the avenue."

Now she began to wonder if she had been right in coming northward. She almost thought, by the position of the moon, that she had overshot the direction of the trader's house, and ought to have tried at the other end. It was not pleasant to think of facing those figures again, but it was a consolation to know that, by night at all events, the natives were even more afraid of the place than she was.

She retraced her steps. The moon was farther up; one could see both sides plainly now, and the place looked, to her overwrought mind, twice as bad as before. She went right down the middle, as far as possible from the grinning, frowning, face-making figures, and did not look at them at all. She had to pass very near the black stones, but that could not be helped. Half-way down now. More than half. The wind had died down again, the avenue was very still. She could hear her tennis shoes going pat, pat over the sand. She smelled the mysterious smell of the forest, cold, sweet, heart calling. With it came a vague odour of something much less pleasant—something that dimly recalled to her hot evenings in suburban streets, when the butcher shops. . . .

Suddenly, certainly, it came to her what the black,

shiny stones were used for. They were braining stones. She had heard of them. She had heard how the victim of a feast was taken by his bound legs and swung so that his skull hit the stone with a bone-shattering crash. These things were done in the sacred dancing ground of the tribe, a spot never visited save on occasions of the highest ceremony, since it was believed—on the authority of all the tribal sorcerers—to be the abode of countless devils, which must not be approached without many and elaborate precautions.

This, then, was the dancing ground. Deirdre, hurrying among the shrined and painted fiends, and the brooding bat-vulture images, with the hideous smell of the braining stones rising up about her, felt as if she had somehow died without noticing it, and found herself in hell. These New Cumberland natives were hardly human anyhow; they were enough to make anyone believe in the regular horns and tail and pitchfork devils of old engravings and pictures. . . . How things, on opposite sides of earth, at opposite ends of history, seemed to meet and mingle! The small fiend looking out of the red sentry-box, just there where the moon fell bright, was a photographic likeness of any theatrical Mephistopheles you might choose to mention. He was like Fursey too. Fursey and the carved fiends and the silent, padding thing that had crossed the glade a minute earlier, swinging a severed head—they were all linked somehow . . . somehow. . . . If one could understand it. They were like. . . . Good God! That was Mr. Conn.

She was not so very much surprised. She had little capacity for surprise left in her, at the close of this amazing day. And Conn, who seemed to

have sprung up out of the earth—Conn, looking in loose silk shirt and flannel trousers, just as she had seen him look in his own house on the top of Wawa Island—was so entirely natural and unalarming, in the midst of this alarming and unnatural place, that she turned to him almost as if she had met him half an hour before. And before she knew what she was saying, she had come out with, “Why are all these devils and natives and the bats the same sort of thing, and why are they all like Fursey?”

It seemed to be characteristic of Conn that he was never surprised.

“Because,” he answered her, as naturally as she had asked, “they really are the one thing. The bats and birds and fiends are the natives’ embodiment of the evil principle in nature. And they’re mostly evil themselves. And Fursey, the swine, is bad,—clear through.”

“I understand,” she said. He seemed to her very clever.

“Well,” said Conn, “you’ve got to get out of this, quick-time; you don’t know what danger you’re in. I won’t ask you what you’re doing here, or—I won’t ask you anything till I have you safe. Come on.”

“Where?” she asked.

He twinkled a little.

“That,” he said, “is my secret.”

CHAPTER IX

“YOUR secret?” asked Deirdre, the eternal woman kindling in her at the thought of a mystery. “*The secret?*”

“*The secret,*” answered Conn.

“But you never told anyone you never trusted—”

“I must trust you now; and besides, I would anyhow. Don’t stop to talk; it’s unsafe. Follow me exactly, and take care of the big shell heaps, they might make the deuce of a noise.”

She had not noticed them before, but she saw them now, in the light of the fully risen moon, bulking behind one row of the shrined devils—mounds and mounds of oyster-shells, new towards the edges of the dancing ground, and loosely piled; old, covered with bush and creepers, as they receded farther and farther into the forest. The size and number of them amazed her; it seemed as if the people of Meliasi must, for centuries, have gathered there to eat their oysters and to pile the shells together.

“Like the ‘middens’ they make such a fuss about among archæologists at home,” said Conn, who seemed to know what she was thinking.

He led her a curious dance, in and out among the shell heaps, until they were well away from the vivid rays of moonlight now pouring down into the dancing ground. It grew dark and darker. An invisible nightbird, astonishingly close, called “Cork!” and

went off with an explosive noise of wings. Something hissed like a steampipe. Deirdre drew closer to Conn; he took her hand, pressed it, and drew her on faster, but said nothing. She could not see him now; he led her, in the intense darkness of the forest, swinging her to right and left, half lifting her, now and then, over some tangle of knitted lianas, or helping her, with strong arm about her waist, to stride some giant log that barred the way. There was no path; she could feel that, with her lightly shod feet, and she wondered at his sense of direction. He never faltered for an instant, but led her, quickly and surely, for some five minutes, and then, with a whispered word, brought her to a halt. He held her hand; she felt him sinking down through the earth. "Keep still," he whispered, with his head at her knee. In a moment he had loosed her hand and was gone. She heard him faintly, underneath; he seemed to be moving stones. "That's right now," came a soft whisper from the ground. "Take one step forward, and let yourself go."

She did with utter faith. If Conn had told her, she would have taken one step forward and let herself go—over Niagara—with faith exactly the same. For all that she did not know it, would not know it yet a while, that was, indeed, what she had already done.

There was an instant of sickening, unsupported drop, and then Conn's arms, catching her knees, springing upward to her waist, and letting her down, with the ease of perfect strength, upon an invisible floor. She could not see him; she could feel him very near. The breast of his silk shirt brushed against her face. She felt that they had left the world; that it was as though they had died, and were alone

together in ultimate space. She read his mind as if he had spoken; she knew that he read hers, and that the thought between them was the same. "Lord, my Lord!" were the words that welled up, unspoken in her heart.

Conn was the first to move. She knew that he drew away from her because they were alone in this forest, because she was solitary, unprotected, in Meliasi. Nine and ninety men in a hundred, she felt, would have acted otherwise. Not her man. He rang pure gold.

"Come on" was all that he said, tongue-tied like most strong men when there was much that cried for speech. But the brush of his long fingers, as he drew them from her arm, was a speech in itself. And Deirdre, wild, sad little gypsy, "ever roaming with a hungry heart," remembered those who had snatched fiercely at her love; who had offered her false loves, false troth, who had longed, and left, and forgotten, in all the history of her many wanderings; and, forgetting for the time, as if it had never been, the strangling noose that she had tied about her neck, she cried, silently, exultingly:

"Here by God's grace is the one man for me."

She followed, through the dark.

In a minute, stooping and winding about, they came into a larger space, perceptible by the sudden freshness of the air. Conn stopped here, and struck a light. A hurricane lamp was standing on a ledge; he lit it, and held it up.

"You can speak now," he said. "If one regiment of soldiers was murdering another down here, no one above ground would hear."

But Deirdre had no desire to speak. She was conscious of a strange over-running calm, as if she had

come, at last, to the end of a long, long road. She looked about her with interest that was incurious, quiet. They were standing in a good-sized cave, the corridor by which they had come showing behind them as a dark, narrow archway. The cave was in no way remarkable. It had walls of coral limestone, full of small pits and basins; the floor was stone and sand. The freshness of the air showed that it had communication without doors, but no openings could be seen.

Stacked in a corner were some tins and plates and a biscuit box, also a spirit lamp. Conn set about the business of making tea, opening tins, laying out biscuits and sheep's tongue on enamelled iron plates, as if he and Deirdre had come down through the forest and into the cave for no other reason than a picnic.

"You want tea," he stated, when it was ready, and set it before her. They shared their meal, with hardly a word. The same curious calm lay upon the girl; she felt that nothing mattered, nothing in all the world since the moment when she had read this man's heart. As for Conn, with his fair dry hair oddly ruffled, and his bright grey eyes now fixing hers, now avoiding them, he was like one who has found a treasure that he has not yet had time to examine; who delights, and yet is puzzled. . . .

With an effort plain to see, he broke into common talk again.

"You haven't told me yet," he said, "how you came to be wandering about Meliasi bush in the dark." He was not very much surprised, it seemed. So many odd things happened in the New Cumberlands. . . .

Deirdre told her tale. She was almost alarmed at the effect of that part of it which referred to Fur-

sey. Conn's face, in the light of the lamp, turned slowly, as she spoke, to a dark, dangerous red, and then to pale again. She saw that his hand was clenched upon his knee, until the knuckles stood out like marbles.

"I'll attend to Fursey," was all that he said. Then he told her that he could take her, by and by, to the trader's house. It was not far away; they could easily get there by nine o'clock. He thought she would be comfortable.

"And then, of course," he stated, "it will be easy for me to come and see you."

Deirdre, under the influence of the sweet drug she had swallowed, somehow, somewhen, in the course of the last half hour, had nothing to say. If he would come, he would.

For a moment they sat silent on the floor of the cave, looking at one another in the diffuse thin light of the hurricane lamp. The same idea occurred to both of them. They were like. Not with any actual likeness of feature or expression, but with the unclassable resemblance known to families as "general family likeness." Deirdre was almost small for a woman, Conn was big for a man; her face was like a flower with a touch of pussy-cat pansy, perhaps—his resembled that of a refined and good-looking young horse. But they were like. They sat in the same manner, easily cross-legged, leaning a little forward as people lean who have travelled much on small inconvenient boats, and learned to do without back-support. Conn had produced cigarettes; they were smoking them in the same way, with the same thoughtful-absent movement of the hand now and then, and the same slow, easy puff. And Deirdre's small, long hand, with the roundish finger-ends and

nails delicate yet strong, was of the same family as Conn's. And her foot was like, in shape. And the shape of her thoughts was like. She knew that so well that she asked him, presently, savouring her cigarette:

"Do you think we are related, by any chance?"

Conn considered the matter. She had already found out that one of his good points lay in the fact that he never said, "Why?"

"I know," he produced. "I've noticed it, too. I think our minds are; and mind shapes body, a good bit."

Then she asked him, a little fearfully, if he had had her odd experience of the hypnotic power of foolish little words and ordinary lines of poetry. She even told him about Smith's Grammar and examples, and the names of the mountain ranges of Ireland.

"They seemed to swim in gold," she said. "The gold of summer's days—some days, the best. And you heard the sea in them. And it was—awfully silly—all that—but it took one's life in its hands and made one whatever it wished."

She told him that she felt her heart come up into her throat when she thought of

"There gloom the dark broad seas, my mariners!"

Amazed, she heard herself telling him all the things she had never thought anyone could understand. And he understood. But he put a strong masculine note into her music.

"You can't let these things run away with you," he said, laying down his cigarette beside him, so that it smouldered and went out—one of her tricks when talking earnestly; she noted it. "Dreams are danger-

ous, in the islands. Best thing is not to think of them as dreams; take them as facts. Not to make oneself egotistic. Girls are darling things, but they do take all their own feelings as special to themselves. Wake up, Deirdre." He gave her arm a little shake. "You're one of a class, and those are our shibboleths. I've got mine—"

"What are they?" she asked breathlessly. She liked the phrase "our" shibboleths.

"Oh, trifling things." He coloured a little. "One is a bit of a poem I read once in a paper—no author—not even sure of the words—I'll tell you—well, it was when I was very young, and they wanted me to be a stockbroker—put me in the office of some abominable old friend of my people's and all that—and I was going over on the Holyhead boat one winter morning; frost and a green sea, and gulls dipping, you know, and the cold smell of the land coming up; and the dashed thing came into my head, don't know where I had read it—

"The stars are with the voyager
Wherever he may sail,
The sun is constant to his time,
The moon will never fail,
But follow, follow, round the earth,
The green earth and the sea. . . ."

Couldn't remember the last lines, but the others got me—just as you say—same way silly little things get hundreds of us—and the gulls and the green sea—not even green earth like the poem, but it fitted all the same—well, they were like a match thrown into something that had been piling up and up for ever so long, and it all went—Whiff! So when I landed, I went to a hotel, and next morning I just crossed

back to Dublin. And I told my father I wasn't going to be a stockbroker, and asked him for fifty pounds. So he said the things they say—"

"Yes?"

"And it was fourteen steerage out to Auckland from London. And I'm twenty-eight now; never repented one second of the time and anyhow did better than my brothers who stayed."

He was lame of speech when it came to telling of his successes; she liked that.

"You are rich, they all say," she finished for him.

"Anyhow," he ended. "I would have done it and kept to it—poor."

"Why?" asked the girl. "Why do we?"

"Because we're the stones of Empire, little girl, and things are built with us. That's why."

"It builds?"

"Yes."

"What is It?"

"God knows. It's not God, and not the devil. But it's pretty near as strong."

"I am frightened of it," said Deirdre after a pause.

"You may be. It does cruel things to all of us. I daresay you know. If you don't, you will."

She thought she did know. She feared, perhaps, she might.

"We're the same," she brought out presently.

"We go down the one road." The words were burdened, heavily, with meaning. More and more the sweet drug, the drug that made her forget that cruel coil about her neck, was invading all her being.

"One road," she heard herself repeat. Then she put her hand on the floor and rose. "I must," she thought dimly.

"What about your secret?" she asked him.

The commonplace query broke into the rare moment as daylight through stained glass shattered by a stone.

She saw him look at her through narrowed eyes, as one who senses a mystery, and then, putting it for the moment aside, he answered her—

"You're to know all that. Look round you. Where do you think this cave is?"

"I couldn't possibly guess."

"Under the biggest and oldest of the shell heaps. Where do you think it leads to?"

"Well, it would lead to the sea, wouldn't it?"

"Right. We're going to follow it."

He took up the hurricane lamp, and led the way. Deirdre was mystified. It seemed the commonest and most uninteresting of coral limestone caves, white-walled, seamed with cracks and pock-marked with small hollows. It was tunnel-shaped, and sloped a little as they went on.

"This must lead out under the sea," she said, remembering that she had climbed no hill since leaving the beach.

"It does, by and by. If it didn't there'd be no secret." He had come to a pause, and was standing still on the sandy floor of the cave, looking at her with a certain touch of mischief. "Don't you want to know all about it?" he asked. The lamp flame wavered a little in a breath of the damp, salty wind that was creeping up from some unknown opening seaward. Conn's sharp-cut features, in the dancing light, took on an odd appearance of grimace.

"Tell me right from the beginning," was her answer. Curiosity had waked up again; she was

burning to know. All those "Conn hunts" she had heard of—all the strategies and trap-layings of Meliasi, wild with cupidity; the bribing and bullying of natives; the "getting at" mail bags—the raid she herself had seen in Wawa Island—all these forces set against Conn's solitary hand and head, and defeated by them, time after time, and she, now, to be given what the whole of the New Cumberlands could not wrest. She had been more than woman if she had not felt the flattery of it.

"The beginning," said Conn—he swung his lantern lightly as he talked, and turned up coral twigs in the sand with the toe of one canvas-clad long foot—"the beginning is that the Meliasi natives always lived on oysters, till some of us came along. Oysters and other things. Long pig sometimes. But oysters, anyhow; they were easy to get. Lapi-lapi, you know—grows in shallow water, sometimes in your depth, sometimes a fathom or two down. Well, lapi-lapi has pearls in it, some of them pretty good. White men didn't come here till thirty or forty years ago. Natives all the time eating lapi-lapi, opening the shells and guzzling the oysters, and when they came to a nasty hard thing in one of 'em, spitting it out on the ground. Went on for centuries about this village here; natives don't change their ways. When we were cutting Charles the First's head off, they were roasting their enemies on sticks here, and drinking cocoanuts, and guzzling lapi-lapi oysters, just the same as today. And piling up heaps and heaps of shells, round about the place where they had their ceremonial feasts. Not in the dancing grounds, you know, alongside of it. Begin to see?"

"Not quite," said Deirdre, with puzzled brow. "Because pearls are so easily spoiled—they must

have been destroyed—a dreadful pity, I suppose, but—”

“Just so. They were. When the pearlers first came here, they went all through the shell mounds. And they found heaps and baskets of pearls, some as big as billy-o, that the natives had spit out. And, of course, when the natives found that the white men were looking, they went through the bush, and got heaps more. Every one of them was spoiled. So the pearlers cursed everything blue, and went away to fish in the harbour, where, of course, the beds had been a bit overfished—but they get a good few all the same. That’s the story of the shell heaps. What do you think of it?”

“Isn’t there more?”

“There is.” Conn set down the lamp, and paused to light another cigarette. Deirdre felt, with the curious clairvoyance that seemed to attend her in this man’s presence, that he was clinging to the last rags of his long cherished secret; that regret, at the necessity of parting with it, mingled with the pleasure he felt in showing her his trust. It was a minute or so before he went on; but the cigarette was lighted and going at last, and he had no more excuse.

“Well,” he said, speaking with his cigarette in the corner of his mouth—a masculine trick that she had always liked. (“It makes their voices sound so casual and—and fascinating,” she thought.) “Well—that was all there was for some time. I was coffee planting—not making a bad thing of it, but it would have been slow. And one day I was out in the bush here; just a chance; no one ever comes that way—if white people want to go to see the dancing ground, the track’s the shortest, and the natives use it too, as far as the dancing ground, and then they strike right off

into the inland forests. But I'd followed up the shell heaps from a sort of archæological interest. They led right back towards the beach, and when I came to the last, I saw a butterfly on one—my word, it was a butterfly! The rarest we have, as big as a small pigeon, with gold wings, and scarlet spots in the middle of them, set round in black velvet; I can see it this minute, the way it perched on the top of the shell heap, opening and shutting its wings in the sun to dry them—because we'd been having rain. And when it saw me, it flew off, strong as a bird—those big ones do. And I whipped off my hat and went hell-for-leather after it. I've never seen one since, by the way."

"Did you get it?"

"What, the butterfly? No. I got a fortune instead. I came a frightful cropper, not looking where I was going, and was knocked half silly. Hit my head on a stone. And when I came round, one leg from the knee down was feeling so queer that I was quite sure it was broken. I couldn't see it, it was in a tangle of creepers, so I tried to get up and stand on it, and down I went again. 'Lord, I'm done for this time,' I thought, for I knew if the niggers found me, they would roast me on a—well, never mind that." For Deirdre was looking at him with wide, horrified eyes. "Where was I? Oh, I tried to stand up, and fell down. And at first I thought I was crippled, but when my head began to get over the knock it had had, I suddenly realized I wasn't, and that it was just a hole my leg had gone into. So I pulled it out, and stood up as good as new. And then I'd alook at the hole. It was just a sort of crack, with a big stone lying almost over it. I pulled off the stone. That was the way you came in with me

a while ago. I keep the stone on it and the creepers trained over; the devil and all his angels couldn't find it, if I didn't choose. Well, I got in and had a look about. You remember, I said it had been raining. It had, and there'd been stormy weather outside. I went down all the way to the sea, and I saw something. It's been raining and stormy weather lately, hasn't it?"

"Yes." She remembered one day of furious wet and wind, spent at the Mission house.

"Come on, and I'll show you what I saw; or some of it. You must understand it was a lot more remarkable the first time. I'll hold the light; you come after."

They went on down the cave. The easy slope continued. Not very far away, now, one could hear a dull, deadened murmur of great waters. The salt-smelling airs grew stronger, drew more steadily from the unseen sea.

"Tide's up," said Conn. "We're coming to it." At the end of the long white tunnel, in the light of the lamp, one could see a tossing glitter.

"Why, it's full—there isn't an outlet," said the girl.

"There isn't, even when tide's out. If there had been—but luckily there wasn't. Now wait a minute."

He had set down the lamp, and was fumbling in the recesses of a rocky shelf. She heard him strike a match. Instantly the cave was flooded by a fierce acetylene flare. Everything stood out as it does in time-exposed photographs. The pupils and irises of Conn's eyes showed as if marked round with a pen. The buttons on his silk shirt displayed each four clear, small needle holes, filled with neat stitching. On the sand, wind-marks and the snake-like

pencillings of hermit crabs were set in clear relief, You could have seen a pin—a grain of sugar.

Conn pointed silently down; here, there, to right, to left. And everywhere he pointed, Deirdre saw—pearls. Loose pearls. Beautiful pearls, shining in the acetylene flare as they had never shown before, but as they were now to shine in the years to come beneath electric lights in far northern lands. They would lie, there, upon the breasts of lovely women; would hang in their ears, and glow like little moons and stars on their white fingers. They would be the cause of intrigues, the rewards of base passions, the gifts of truest love. They would clasp the necks of innocent débutantes, and dangle in rich coils down the waists of famous harlots. Lands and houses were locked up in those moony little spheres; great motor cars, trained, bowing ranks of servants. The keys of the world lay in them. Who held as much of the greater pearls as his two hands could clasp, might fly on the wings of the wind to every country on earth that has called the hearts of men. Italy, Greece, India, Japan, Paris and Rome, Madrid, Vienna, New York, the Taj Mahal, the Pyramids, California, the Rio Grande, the silent reaches of the Amazon, the thunders of the Horn—all, all, were clasped in the tiny rounds of the shining trivial things that lay scattered like drops of hail on the cave floor.

Deirdre was imaginative; she had the artist's soul. She took it in with one glance, and the wonder made her feel faint.

It was as if she had been shown in a single instant "the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them."

"Why," she said at last, "you must be far, far richer than anybody thought. You must be a mil-

lionaire!" And she felt a little, selfish pang of regret. No woman who loves desires her man to be too rich. She senses rivalry, in the tremendous power of gold.

Conn did not answer. Bent over the sandy floor, he was busying himself as, perhaps, no man save he had ever, since the beginning of the world, been busied. He was scooping up pearls with both hands from the ground; gathering them in as one gathers berries fallen from a tree. Many of them were small, some very small; many were yellowed and off colour, others irregular in shape. But every here and there, among the wind-ripples of the sand, lay a pearl as big and as round as a pea; once in a way he would find a pear-shaped gem; and just once, stooping over a hollow made by a little drip from the roof of the cave, he found, nested in it like the egg of some fairy bird, a pearl of oval shape, clear, shining, and an inch at least in length. He held it up silently. It was Deirdre who screamed.

"Yours," he said, and put it in her hand.

"Oh, I couldn't," she cried. "It's worth a fortune." It seemed marvellous to her, feeling the small cold thing in her fingers, that this accidental bit of an oyster should have power to make secure, until old age and death, the life of anyone who owned it. All necessity of labour, of anxiety, of planning for holidays, or "managing" without things one wanted, all fears of anything in the long list of human woes that money could prevent or cure, would be wiped out forever, if she but kept hold of this little, cold smooth object in her hand. What fairy tale was stranger?

But one could not do such things, even when one had only three hundred a year, and was anxious

about interest and investments. She knew that women, good women, some of them, did take presents of jewels and jewellery from men. She knew that many of her acquaintance would have thought a year's scheming and planning none too long, if they could, at the end of it, have extorted in any possible manner just such an offer as she had listened to. She knew Conn meant it; and that there was no string tied to the offer; no recompense understood. Yet. . . .

The instinct of the thoroughly decent woman—and Deirdre was a Celt—runs strongly, even violently, against the taking of valuables from men. There is, in her mind, but one thing possible to give in exchange. She did not reason about that; she did not know why the pull of the slip-knot round her neck became suddenly perceptible once more, this time with the cruellest tug it ever had given her. She only turned a little white, and held out the pearl in her curved palm, guarding it as she held it—one must be careful with a thing of such great price. . . .

"Please do take it," she said.

Conn, straightening up, with his fists full of pearls, looked at her, and saw she meant it. For some reason undefined, he grew as pale as she. But he spoke in a commonplace tone.

"Why, of course, if you would rather not—hold on a minute till I put these away."

He worked a small leather bag out of a pocket with one unoccupied finger, and began spilling the pearls into it.

They went in with a delicious cold rattling sound. Deirdre found herself completely human and covetous as she listened to that pattering of magic rain. She would have liked, dearly, to own the power, the

ease, it represented. And yet she was disappointed that Conn was rich! . . .

When the bag was almost filled, and his hands were emptied, Conn took the big pearl from her. He had not asked her to accept it a second time. She felt the wrench at her heart that any woman would have felt as she watched the wondrous thing disappear. Conn tied the bag up, and placed it in a recess of the cave wall.

"I don't take them home when I'm going by the ordinary track route," he explained. "Not safe. Some of Fursey's lot might surround me and go through me. I dive out through the water at the end and swim to an open place where I leave my boat. The boys think I'm out for a swim."

He was scanning the cave floor as he spoke, searching with stooped head for any stray gem that might have escaped his harvesting. "A fair crop this time," he said, straightening up.

"Crop? Do you get them every time?"

"I wouldn't if I didn't choose the right time, of course. After high winds and rain. It's a chance in a million, one way you look at it, that the things should have escaped in that particular fashion. And yet not so wonderful after all. Perhaps it's happened in other places, only nobody knows. You see, pearls are delicate things, and all the nigs let fall on the ground got weathered and spoiled—all that stopped there, that is."

"But just about the neighbourhood of the shell heaps there are any number of little cracks; sort of thing you do find on soil that's made up of decayed coral, you know. And lots of the pearls went down the cracks. Now that wouldn't have helped them, much, if they'd only landed in the dirt and mess of a

common cave floor. But they didn't. Heaps of 'em stopped in the cracks. Well—in stormy, windy weather, the spray beat into those cracks—not at any other time—and the pearls got a bath of sea-water often enough to keep them all right. Then when it rained, the cracks were flooded from above, and they got swept down, every time, into this cave, which is clean and salty, not like the other ones, and there they stopped."

"How was it they didn't get washed out to the end where the water is, or carried away by spray in high tides?"

"The rain sank through the sand mostly, and where it didn't it trickled down to that little break-water of rock you see, and damned up and ran over. But the pearls stopped. Like the riffles in a sluice box. Fact is, the whole cave is a sort of sluice box, only it sluices pearls instead of gold. Everywhere there is a kink in the sand, or a little bar of rock, the pearls collect. You should have seen it the first time. Now I only get what has come down since the last visit I've made, and that's getting less and less ever time; some day it'll peter out altogether. But the day I found it—brought a lamp down to have a look; didn't expect anything more than just a cave like any other—and when I came along here, and held up the lamp—well, it didn't match my acetylene flare, but it showed something the flare never got a chance to. I swear the place was fairly paved with pearls. Like something in the Arabian Nights. I wallowed in 'em. I hopped about like a kid, and sang things, and then I was afraid somebody might hear me—didn't know the place as well as I know it now—and I knocked off, and started to crawl among the pearls and scoop 'em up. Then I'd noth-

ing to put them in, so I took off my undershirt, and tied them up in that, and buttoned my shirt again, and when I was crossing the track to get back to the beach, if I didn't come across a whole gang from Meliasi who'd been out at the trader's. And they asked me what I'd been looting. And I gave the bundle a hitch under my arm, and said, 'Pearls, old chap,' to the man who'd asked me. It looked *like* pearls—a lump of a parcel you could have put a turkey in! 'Well, if you won't tell, you won't,' says he sulkily; he was more than half drunk, and I cut on without any more talk to the beach, and when I got alongside of my boat, I heaved the bundle at the cox'n as if it was old boots, and then hopped in myself, and we shoved off. And the gang stood on the beach, and asked each other was it curios or kai-kai (food), that I was so disobliging about. They were dead sure it was something I'd been looting from the natives. Of course, when I began to show up my hand a bit, a year or so after, they ought to have remembered that, but they didn't, it was too simple and ordinary for them. And they never saw me about these parts again. I took care of that. It's only a matter of starting a good way off, and working through the bush. Sometimes, just for fun, I've started off when I knew I'd be seen, and led them the devil of a chase ten miles from here. They are pretty sick of their Conn hunts now, I reckon."

"Aren't you afraid of their getting at the thing through what you send away? Or do you send it?"

"Oh, Lord, yes—been sending to a decent old Jew chap in Melbourne ever since I found the place. Well, to answer you—did they find anything when you saw them loot my house?"

"I heard them swearing because they had only got some beads and trade belts."

Conn laughed the odd soundless laugh that was so peculiarly his.

"I banked on their stupidity when I put those belts in. They're not belts in reality. Of course we do trade with all sorts of gaudy stuff; but those strips of blue and yellow velvet are for testing the colour of the pearls with. You lay them on the stuff, and if a white pearl looks pure white on the blue, it's a damned good one, because, of course, the blue tends to make it look yellow. And if you can make a medium coloured one look all right on the yellow—really, the shade is more cream—it will do. But if it looks yellow, it's not worth sending down—from my point of view—unless it happens to be very big. And about the beads. Why, they *found* my pearls—had them in their hands. The lot I am sending down next boat were inside the beads."

"Inside! But how—?"

"Easy enough. The old boy in Melbourne sends them up to me ready prepared, common looking big trade beads with a gilt or a coloured stripe round them. There's a join under the stripe. I've some neat little tools I use in detaching the halves; chloroform, too, to melt the special cement. Then I pack a pearl or two in each, and cement them up again, and smooth off. As for the very big ones, I put them into the lumping big beads the nigs sling round their necks like a locket."

"Aren't you afraid they may get them in the mail bags some time? Or mightn't they wonder why you send down beads?"

Conn doubled over with laughter this time.

"It is such a game," he said, wiping his eyes. "Why, Furseys sends them for me!"

"What!"

"Fact, as I'm alive. He trades a good bit in ivory nuts; nice clean things, and always carefully sewn up in bags. Well, the man who buys them is the man who buys my pearls. Furseys thinks he got a mighty bargain out of him when he screwed him for a shilling or two a bag above market price, and got him to sign a contract based on a false market report. It was put up between the Jew and me, to make sure the nuts went to the same market all the time. And every now and then a bag has a string or two of beads in it. If the bags were to meet with an accident, it would be only the loss of a few pearls to me, not the loss of the whole show—because no one would think the beads anything but a mistake, or perhaps they might think a nigger had stolen them, and planted them there. Do you see?"

"I do, but I can't imagine how you get them into the bags; do you get a native to do it?"

"Not much! No, no one in the world but myself and the Jew—and you—knows—or suspects anything about it. There's no great difficulty after all; I wait for a dark night, and put on khaki and get into the store on the wharf; of course, the lock is a common one. And I undo the stitching of a bag or two, and slip the beads in, and put my private mark on them, and sew them up; use a dark lantern to do it, but anyhow I can work by feeling. Furseys and his gang get at the chap who makes up the mail bag—we have a kind of amateur post office—and steam my letters; and they cut open a parcel with a pair of boots to be soled, and run pins in all over the boots—I've seen the marks. And anything at all I send

south by any chap on the steamer—orchids for a friend, or a bag of those mangoes I have, or stuffed birds—well, they go all through it, and rip everything up. I know. And all the time—” He bent over with the shaking soundless laugh again.

Deirdre stood amazed. This was the man who had kept his secret, at the risk of his life, from all the island world, who might, if he liked, have kept the greater part of it even from her! And he had not said a word—not a single word—about secrecy. He had not once asked her to keep the matter to herself.

She knew she could not have done it. No matter how much she trusted anyone, she would have found it impossible to refrain from just one little warning—a mere word—“I know it’s unnecessary to ask you . . . of course I trust you perfectly. . . .” And in the act of expression, the trust would have been smeared and spoiled.

He did not say the word, give the warning. Not while they were in the cave, nor while he was leading her back to the opening in the forest, climbing up to see that all was clear, and helping her through the hole on to firm ground above. Nor yet while they were walking, through bush well lighted now by a high-sailing moon, to the open track and the not far-off house of the trader. He talked not at all, in fact, for, as he had hinted to her in the cave, it was dangerous to be found by any of the cannibal natives, wandering at night in the neighbourhood of their sacred places. But when they had all but reached the little tin hut near the beach, where Carbery, the trader, lived with his white wife, he looked at her, half mischievously, in the clear moonlight, and laid one finger, for a moment, on her lips. And

then or thereafter, that was all the warning that he gave.

But all night long, after she had been introduced to Mrs. Carbery, had gone to bed, had seen the moon climb round from one side of her stretched mosquito net to the other, and heard the tide ebb out and out down the beach, turn and come back and wash beneath the walls—she lay awake, hands folded, eyes open wide, feeling, hour after hour, the strange light kiss of his finger on her lips. And she remembered—and wondered whether Conn had not remembered too, for all he said he had forgotten—the last two lines of the little wander song—

“For love is with the lover’s heart
Wherever he may be.”

CHAPTER X

IT was a strange house of the Carberys', and a strange life that Deirdre led there.

Inanimate things in the New Cumberlands had a way of looking more or less alive; of suggesting strange comparisons. The township of Meliasi was like a company of frightened houses running away from the terrors of the forest to take refuge in the sea. The black, unknown hill ranges that lay behind took on the forms of lurking beasts of prey; one lay crouched backed like a puma on the spring; another drove head down, and horrible great shoulders heaved, as one imagines the fearsome shapes of bisons in museums must have gone, when they were alive and fiery-eyed. And Carbery's place, taking on the strange characteristics of this strangest of all lands, looked, to Deirdre, like a little white house that had poised desperately on the edge of deep water to drown itself, but had never got up courage to leap in. It was a lost-looking house, with wide glassy eyes staring under its narrow verandah, and a ladder that fell from its door like a panting tongue. You went round a point of land to find it, and you found it where you did not expect, right on the verge of the shore that had come up to meet you again. There was no particular road to it; you plunged out of the bush, and went along the sand, and there it was on its high piles, hanging over a deep inlet on one

side, looking on the beach with the other. The sea beat, blue and green, below its door, and there were palm trees, with thin dancing shadows, and the wind always blew, and always swept the tinkling twigs of coral down the empty beach, where the sun, in defiance of astronomic laws, seemed always to be setting, low and gold. So, at least, Deirdre remembered it, in days to come.

She remembered, too, that the lonesomeness, the fara-wayness, of the place were beyond all telling. White people never seemed to come there—except one—natives came, often, but they were sullen, silent, and half-scared, like all the New Cumberland folk. They made their bargains with Carbery—a ton of copra for a rusty old gun; sacks on sacks of fungus and ivory nuts for one bottle of the fiery gin sold by the traders. They stood about the store on the beach for a minute or two, bands of them, naked, oiled and tattooed, with fierce eyes ringed round in black paint; carrying bundles of poisoned arrows in their hands, which they would scarcely lay down to inspect Carbery's goods, or to unload the bundles that they carried for sale. Business concluded, they backed away into the forest, watching, cannily, not only the trader, but his wife and Deirdre, lest some treachery at the hands of the mistrusted whites should be suddenly loosed upon them. Then there would follow days when no one came, when the wind blew and blew, and the sea crashed under the house, and small white crabs went spinning down the beach so fast that one thought they were only skeleton leaves blown seaward, and nothing happened at all, for ever and ever.

Carbery was a man without any particular characteristics, or any marked nationality; he accepted

Deirdre's board-money, but never let her know, by word or sign, whether she was welcome in his house, or the reverse. Deirdre thought, on the whole, that he took drugs, but she was not always sure. Mrs. Carbery was an Irishwoman of the most Celtic type, given to fits of a sort of exalted melancholy, and full of strange fancies and beliefs. She spent much of her time fortune-telling—with cups, with cards, with signs from the bush, the birds, the sea—anything, everything—for herself, for her husband, who took not the smallest interest, for Deirdre, whenever Deirdre would let her.

"Ye are down-hearted, gurl," she told her. "Listen now, ye have no call to be, for whatever's the trouble, the cards spoke well last night and ye have only to wait."

"I'm not down-hearted a bit: I don't know what you mean. I'm enjoying myself lots," retorted Deirdre, who had gone with the silent Carbery, a day before, to see some marvellous native dances in a hill village, and returned loaded — vicariously — with amazing curios. "I'm seeing things hardly anybody has seen. Did you ever go to the drum-dance—where they dance with live pigs on their shoulders? It's—"

"Your card kem up in the middle of the pack," flowed on Mrs. Carbery. "And the card with the ship, that manes sorrow when the dark side is turned to ye—this time it was for joy, though all the other times it has been for the black, black sorrow. I niver told ye that, but daughter of Airyan it has me heart scalded all the time since you came, that the black side was always forninst ye. Ye be to have had throuble, gurl, and maybe it's not run out yet."

"Everyone has trouble," fenced Deirdre, feeling

the drag of the half-forgotten noose anew. She had more than her share just then, it seemed to her, noose or no noose. Conn had been to see her once, and not again. It was time—quite time—for him to have found his way over to Carbery's a second time, if he really wanted to. But the wind had blown and the tinkling corals danced away down the beach, and the ghostly little crabs blown about like leaves, day after day, and evening had filled the beach and bay with flooding melancholy sunsets that seemed destined to end all things, each time they came—and still, still, Conn of the Hundred Fights had kept away.

Mrs. Carbery's fortune-tellings, foolish though they seemed, in reality raised her spirits somewhat; but she did not feel inclined for talk that afternoon. She felt she had to wander out yet once more along the wind-blown beach, to look for the twentieth time round the corner of the point, to assure herself, again, that there really was nobody, nobody at all, coming out of the bush.

And behold, there was someone!

Her heart jumped up, and then went down—not quite all the way. It was not Conn, it was a white man, tallish, very slim, astonishingly well dressed, lightly bearded—Des Roseaux, in fact, the French Commissioner, whom she had met, once, at the Mission island. She knew him for a gossip. He was more welcome in that character than he could have been in any other. Surely, he would have something or other to tell that would throw light. . . .

Des Roseaux had. Seated on Carbery's verandah, pretending, with French courtesy, to like his host's fierce rum, which had assuredly never seen the Jamaica it bore on its label, Des Roseaux flirted, determinedly and naïvely, with Deirdre—which she

did not mind in the least—and between times poured out all the gossip of Meliasi and the harbour islands, like a walking newspaper.

She waited for Conn's name. She felt it was coming. It did.

"We are all delighted," declared Des Roseaux, "ravished, that Mr. Conn has got off so well. You will have heard, without doubt, Mademoiselle, of his attack on that confoundable beast, Fursey. It was a little rough, but they say Fursey had brokek into his house, and has stole some of his goods. There is a whisper—but let's be discreet. I not whisper it. He had cause enough, assuredly, for what he has done."

"What was that?" asked Deirdre, a little anxiously. She did not understand.

Mrs. Carbery had joined them, and was standing on the verandah in a tragic-muse attitude—not in the least affected, but natural—one hand set on the table, the other flung down and back. Her hair was more than commonly dishevelled by the wind, and she had forgotten to take off her cooking apron. She, also, listened, but with the air of one to whom earthly affairs were not more important than one might imagine they were to the inhabitants of Mars.

"You have certainly heard about it," answered Des Roseaux incredulously. "No? You have not heard that Fursey has been caught, who was stealing some things in Conn's house, and that Conn has veritably given him the father and mother of a beating?"

Des Roseaux's English, at times, displayed strange lapses, of which he was simply unconscious. But Deirdre was too anxious to laugh.

"What has he done?" she asked. She scented

trouble ahead. Was there nothing but trouble in the world?

"I will tell it to you. He has first fought this Fursey—"

"Fursey," remarked the man Carbery, looking through the bedroom door, "can beat his weight in wild cats." And immediately went away.

"It's true," allowed Des Roseaux, "but Conn, to what I think, is all the same his weight in wild leopards. And he has got better of Fursey, though my word, they have had a fight. Then, Conn, he has said, so the boys tell, 'You are licked' to Fursey, 'and now I will lick you proper,' and he has took his stingaree tail—"

"Oh!" The cry was from Deirdre. She had not lived in the island world without knowing what a stingaree tail could do.

"And he has cut that Fursey to a ribbon. And Fursey, he sings out—what do you call it—and all the time now and then Conn he say—'Sing, damn you, sing till I tell you to stop.' It is as if he is mad. Fursey has been howling like a dog, and all the time all the more Conn he tell him, 'You sing very well;' he tell him, 'Now sing some more.' So it arrived that by and by the boys they are very much frightened, and they run and fetch Mr. Blackbury—"

"Where did it all happen?" gasped Deirdre.

"In Meliasi, as I have told you (he had not), right in the street. Oh, I am not finish yet. It's magnificent. Mr. Blackbury he came running, and when he came, Conn laughed and he has thrown down the stingaree tail, and he says: "Take that thing to the Mission, and maybe, if they are good Christian, they will nurse it, and keep it out of hell a little while.' And then Blackbury, he begin to talk.

Name of a name, Blackbury can talk! And if Conn cut Fursey to ribbon with his stingaree, then Blackbury do the same to Conn with his tongue. For why, he was intentioning to have Fursey deported on the next man-of-war, and now he say Fursey have a case, and why will the man-of-war listen to me when I talk? And he say very many things about the badness of Conn. So Conn stand there planted in the dust, and he look, very still, with that white-fire look he have, and he says: 'Mr. Blackbury, have you finished quite?' Blackbury makes a nod. Then Conn stands up very straight, after his fashion—"

Des Roseaux imitated it. Deirdre, listening with her heart still oddly out of place, and her hands turning cold, could see the whole scene—could see Conn, with the "white fire" in his face and eyes, standing over prostrate, beaten Fursey like St. George over the dragon, not once excusing himself, because he would not drag her name into the dust of the fight.

"And he says, 'Then I will tell you, you would have done it yourself.' And Blackbury who's not any fool, cock his eye at him—so"—Des Roseaux mimicked cleverly—"and he says—'I would have done it myself, and why?' Conn look at him with that stare he have and he is shouting out at the top of his voice—'Because Fursey have broken into my house, and open my safe. That is the why.' 'You have no other reason?' says Blackbury. 'Oh,' say Conn, 'he has tried to kill me some time. I remember now.' 'And me, I remember,' Blackbury is saying. 'No, but I will not denounce you to the man-of-war, when she come. But this conduct in the public street, it goes too far; you shall pay me a fine.' Conn say he have no right to make fines, but John-Bull-Blackbury, he nod his big bull head, and he say

—‘Right or no right, I will not have this; I shall fine you ten pounds for the new wharf.’ Then Conn, he say, ‘Right, sir,’ and he put his hand into the pocket of Fursey, and pull out some nugget of gold. ‘Here, then, are you robbing the man?’ says John Bull. ‘Yes, I am robbing him of that he robbed me,’ Conn is saying, and out he take six big nugget. ‘Bait for fools,’ he say, and he give them to Blackbury. ‘That is ten’ he say, and then he feel again, and take out more. ‘That is the last, and it shall be the fine for the next time, which I pay in advance,’ he says. And all the time, Fursey lie half dead. ‘Conn, my boy, you will make a spoon or spoil a horn, but anyhow I think you will never make old bones,’ says Blackbury, and he drop the gold in his pocket and saves himself.”

Deirdre had listened with forced calm. She felt sick as the story went on. What was to come of it? And why had not Conn—oh—the Frenchman was speaking again.

“But you will forgive me, I’ve forgotten—Mr. Conn has entrust me with a letter. At your service, Mademoiselle.” He bowed as he handed Deirdre an envelope unlike the usual island stationery, which, as all the Pacific world knows, is scratchy grey outside, and lined “correspondence block” within. This was thick, rough-edged, and creamy-white, and the paper and envelope matched. It had a heavy black heading inside — “WAWA, NEW CUMBERLANDS.” So Deirdre saw when, asking pardon, she opened the letter. There might be an answer to send. . . .

“Well, what a letter,” said her mind. With her lips, she said, “There’s no answer; thank you very much for bringing it,” adding inaudibly, “Now do

go away like a good man, and let me read it again."

Perhaps Des Roseaux, like a true Frenchman, guessed. At any rate, he stayed not very much longer. He had business, he explained, on the other side of the point; there was a French trader there whom he wished to see. They would all hope to see Mademoiselle in Meliasi soon, and the British Commissioner's whaleboat, as well as his own, were entirely at her disposal.

Deirdre, free, made at once for her room, followed by an entirely understanding remark from Mrs. Carbery—"Daughter of Airyan, it bid to be the ship card did it after all!" Sitting on her bed, she re-read the letter.

It was without beginning or end.

"He has got some of what he deserved. I shall see you in a week from today.

"STEPHEN CONN."

"There's a good deal of voltage about that," she commented, studying the letter,—if such it could be called. She had not roamed the world for nothing. She knew, as the wise woman knows, that the man who writes in sentences like hammer strokes is the man who expends himself in action. It is the weaver of beautiful words who hangs back at a pinch.

Besides—the form of the letter showed thought for her. If lost or mislaid, it contained nothing to start gossip, in spite of all that was between the lines. Deirdre made no mistake about that. She knew what Conn was coming for, as well as if he had written ten sheets to say.

And now, for the first time in her life, temptation assailed her seriously. Why tell him?

She had found the man; she had met her fate. The poppy-flower of her love for Adrian Shaw had bloomed and had its day, a brief day at best; nor had it been so very hard for her—after all—to pluck it up by the roots and cast it out. But this—this—was a growing tree. The wrench of tearing it out from the hold it had taken—even so soon—was more than she could bear to think of. Conn was life; the meaning of life. What would be left if she sent him away? She understood, now, what had been left when she dismissed the other man. There had always been, subconsciously, the feeling that, after all, it was not the end. The horizon had not closed down; the road by which the Prince might come lay still open. Now, he was here. If he went, there was no future any more. Life without hope—how did people bear it?

Some of them did not bear it. She understood that now. She had never understood before.

The house was unendurable. She went out on to the beach, and found a place where nobody could see her—had there been anyone—and where she could see nothing but the thin palm trunks, curving like flower stems all round her, and the blue and green of the sea inlaid between. There she sat down, on the clinking coral shale, and put her head in her hands, and thought and thought. . . .

Why tell him? What was she to do? Was she to go on wandering for ever—"ever roaming with a hungry heart," shut off from all that made life worth the living? Was that wretched piece of schoolgirl folly to hang round her neck, like a diver's necklace of lead, for ever, always dragging her down to sunless solitary depths? She could not understand how it was that she was the same creature as that

priggish, bookish girl, how it came about that she must suffer for the idiot's faults. Idiot, trebly-dyed! What had Rogers, her student "husband," really been like? She could hardly remember now. Dark, rather; tall, rather; romantic and ill-balanced with his half-cooked Socialism and his high-flown gallantry; hard set, she remembered, against the very idea of a certain smug Government post that his people were keeping warm for him; wearing red ties, and inclined to vegetarianism and woman's suffrage. She had not had the faintest affection for him; but she remembered a certain vague kindness, born of gratitude, that had caused her to regret—at first—his mysterious disappearance. It had all worn out long before Shaw took the trouble of investigating the matter. She recalled how hard she had had to fight against feeling frankly disappointed that he wasn't dead. A few weeks after she had written to the asylum doctor, asking him to let her know "if any change occurred." He had acknowledged her note, briefly, almost rudely. Since then—nothing. She knew Rogers would live for ever. Lunatics always did.

"Why don't they set one free, then?" she had asked Adrian Shaw that day in Camacho's courtyard.

"There are two reasons," Shaw had answered, becoming the lawyer at once. "First, because it would open the way to collusion between parties who wished to separate. A stay in an asylum could always be arranged. . . . Then, no doctor can say for certain that a lunatic cannot possibly recover. Some new discovery in medicine may take place. The X-Rays cured a good many hopeless cases—showed that the trouble was really a surgical matter.

There might be something else tomorrow. And anyhow, mental practice is full of surprises."

"Don't some countries give divorce for lunacy?"

"Quite a number. I think myself that we should. But that has nothing to do with your case. We must take the laws as they stand. Damn them!"

How well she remembered it all—the cold, professional voice expounding, the sudden break into a very human warmth and indignation, the wretched silence that followed. . . . Over long ago, all that. Over, as the mad days in Dublin were over and dead. But their results remained; the seeds sown by them had come up and flourished. And she had to reap.

"I will not," she suddenly cried, to the palms and the empty sea. "Why should I spoil my life? What possible sin do I commit, if I say nothing?"

"Bigamy," said a small voice within her. "Something one can be sent to penal servitude for."

"There's nobody here to send one to penal servitude," she answered the voice. "And bigamy's only a name. Just as the marriage was only a name. I am not married. Anyhow," she thought, rising and turning her face towards the mad little house that had run down to drown itself in the sea, and hesitated for ever on the verge, "there's no reason at all to worry about it—now, I haven't been asked by anyone to marry him. And I won't think about it for another minute."

Long, yet short, was that week during which she waited for Conn—knowing well that he had chosen to give the whispers about her and Fursey and his own part in the drama full time to blow over before coming to see her again. Mrs. Carbery enlivened the days now and then with bursts of fortune-telling, in which she professed to see a dark man who stood

across Deirdre's path, a fair man who loved her, dangers threatening, fortunes hanging—in the balance—all the old stock-in-trade of the prophetess, yet curiously appropriate. She found Deirdre one day under the palm trees crying. She did not ask her what was the matter; it appeared she knew—without any foolish preliminary of asking.

"Daughter of Airyan," she remarked philosophically, "what does it matter? What does anything matter? Answer me that?"

"It matters a lot when you can't marry the man you like," answered Deirdre, stung into candour surprising even to herself. But Mrs. Carbery was not surprised.

"Not at all," was her reply, given in the usual tragic-prophetess attitude. "Sure, not at all. Or har'ly anything at all. Gurl, do ye think anny of us does?"

"I—I don't know. I never looked at it like that."

"Then I can tell ye. No wan does. Do ye think I did? Or that Sassenach bull on the Governmin' Island? Did yer mother or yer father? They did not. Nor will you. Sure the cards would tell it, if nothin' else did. But it doesn't need the cards, daughter. Ye can read it in the worruld."

.

"It's a good game," said Blackbury, laying down his cards. "Bridge they call it? There's your nine-and-six; you'd double your salary pretty soon if you played me every night."

"No, sir; you'd beat me. You pick it up wonderfully."

"Gatehouse," said the Commissioner, unmoved, "you are a little bit of a liar; but not more than a

secretary should be. I'm rather slow over it. Conn there picks it up like a pigeon picking up peas."

"Mr. Conn seems to pick up everything that's going," observed the Secretary, shuffling the pack.

There was a double meaning in the words. Conn showed that he saw it; his hard, sea-grey eyes fixed themselves on Gatehouse, with an expression translatable as "You and I will have a talk together, one of these days." What the Commissioner saw or did not see, no one could tell.

It was another of the white, windy nights familiar in Meliasi, well known to wanderers over the South Sea World. The south-easter—never known as the "trade" in local speech—was hard at work crashing the palm heads together, slatting and booming among the verandah blinds till a blind man might have supposed the Residency was a ship, hard put to it to make port in the midst of a heavy gale. The three men who, with Des Roseaux, had just finished their game of cards, were sitting silent, all of them smoking, all of them thinking the "long, long thoughts" of the island world.

Des Roseaux spoke first.

"I see them almost," he said.

"Who?" was Gatehouse's natural reply.

"All those women. Those women which we love."

"Who loves them, and why?" asked Blackbury somewhat drily, pipe in one corner of his mouth. His hair, darkish, mixed with grey, and curly, stood up a little, just as John Bull's hair stands in Tenniel's immortal drawings. His broad, shaven cheeks, backed by narrow whiskers, were curved into the least of smiles, showing wonderfully perfect teeth. Again, one missed the top-boots and the bull-dog; one felt they ought to have been there. . . .

Des Roseaux went on.

"Never I see some men like this, who sit silent, who think, think, in some place far away from the home, but I see, also, the woman each man think about. On the deck of ships I've seen them, many a time, those women who walk like ghosts, thin, as glass, so that the sun or the moon shine through. No, I haven't known who they are, but I see them. Now, on this floor"—he pointed dramatically to the empty space of verandah boarding—"there walk, unseen, four women, beautiful, sad, that the thoughts of us four men have create—"

"Granted the beauty, how do you know they're sad?" asked Blackbury, round the stem of his pipe.

"Because we, all of us, are far away," was Des Roseaux's answer.

"Not good enough. They might be glad. They might have forgotten," said the Commissioner lightly.

"Ah no, my friend, it is sure that those four women—I mean the four that rises into our minds all of us when I speak, for no doubt there are others too—"

"No doubt, Don Juan."

"It is sure that those four will remember us, because woman remembers, always, the man who deserted her, and we have them deserted, all!"

"None of them deserted us, by any chance?" asked Conn cheerfully. Blackbury was silent.

Des Roseaux went on.

"It is simple. We are none of us husbands. We have loved all of us, because every man not a youth has done so. I don't speak of the little ladies of the pavement, but of the serious affection. Well, we love, we do not marry, we go to the end of the

world. Tell me there is not one we have all of us leaved behind, who remember, who weep! All four, I see her, I think it was not willing, that we lose that lady. It has been fate, perhaps."

"How do you know we're none of us husbands?" spoke Conn jestingly. "I might have a wife in every port between Galway and Meliasi, for all you know." But he was thinking, as he spoke, of Deirdre, all alone with the trader and his wife away on the desolate mainland. Did she think he had deserted her? Hers was the figure that had flickered before his eyes as the Frenchman spoke.

"You are not married," pronounced Des Roseaux. "I am not married." He went on, exactly as if he were repeating a verb. "He," indicating Blackbury, "is not married. You," addressing the silent Gatehouse, "are not married, too, that is so?" He spoke as if certain of the fact.

Gatehouse looked up, and answered calmly, "I am."

"News to me," remarked Blackbury.

Des Roseaux was staring dramatically. "Married? She is dead?" he asked.

"Certainly not," replied the Secretary. "As much alive as I am."

"Why have you never told this?"

"I can't remember that anyone asked me."

"But your wife, where is she?"

"Somewhere on earth."

"You know her alive?"

"Yes. Is this a confessional?"

"I demand pardon. I have been surprised. Will we have another game of cards? Bridge, I find it very good."

The subject was dropped at once, and cards went

ahead for the rest of the evening. Conn played badly. He was intrigued and amazed by the Secretary's confession. He had never thought of Gatehouse—if he had thought of him at all—as a married man. He felt vaguely that a fellow his own age had no right to be, so long as he himself wanted to, and was not. It was, somehow, like Gatehouse's cheek. No, he had never liked him. One thing he was compelled to allow; Gatehouse was no liar. His character was tortuous and strange—beyond Conn's understanding at times—but it was, at least, sound. He need not have told the truth just now; it seemed he did not want to. . . . Why?

"So far as I've yet grasped the game," came Blackbury's deep bass, "it seems to be considered bad form to revoke, partner; especially when— No apology, but wake up a bit if you can."

"Sorry," said Conn, wrenching back his attention to his hand.

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They parted fairly late. The wind was down; the dead hours lying between twelve and four o'clock had started on their course. Under the Residency island, the sea lay marble, silver-veined. Lights were out in the town; a thick, sweet, chilly scent came from the forest lying close behind—a midnight, mysterious scent. The bison-shouldered hills, where no man went, heaved black against the moon; you would have sworn that they were thundering in a herd, down on the crouching houses that had run to the end of the land. There was a curious silence, fretted only, at its fringes, by the faint "fish-fish"

of the sinking tide. A silence that did not merely happen; a silence that was kept.

Conn, Celt to the core, felt it. He wondered if the others— No. They did not love this sinister country as he loved it; its personality, for them, did not exist.

The French Commissioner was yawning, politely, behind his hand, a vision of white sheets and vaporous mosquito netting, well tucked in, possessed him. Gatehouse, tall, curiously stately in his bearing, stood silent in the moonlight, arms folded so as to make his shoulders, in their white dinner-coat, look very broad. He seemed, so standing, much more like a representative of royalty than the sturdy, wide-bellied Blackbury. Britain's Commissioner, also yawning a little, shook hands with his guests, and told Conn, brusquely, that he'd be obliged, when the latter next went to Carbery's (there was little, it seemed, that the Commissioner did not know) if he brought Miss Rogers back with him to the Residency. It was, Blackbury remarked, the only suitable place in the Cumberlands for her to stay, and since wandering females would come there, it was up to him, more or less, to see they didn't get into mischief.

"I've no idea at all of giving my good Des Roseaux a chance for his country by having an agreeable young female roasted on a stick by the cannibals, within hail of Meliasi, as a sample of what British prestige amounts to," he observed. "Of course," he added, "you'll bring Mrs. Carbery too. She'll be an addition to the house; she can keep the boys from combing their hair with the dinner forks, once in a way."

Something in the casual speech induced Conn to

wring Blackbury's hand when saying good-bye. After the tongue-lashing in public, down in Meliasi street, which Conn had stood so unwillingly—this! He would swear that the Commissioner understood the whole thing from beginning to end, in spite of the attitude he had, officially, taken up. The liking, curiously filial, that a man in the twenties often feels for one in the fifties, took hold of him. He wondered, as he went down the winding track to the sea, why Blackbury hadn't ever married anyone. Conn's thoughts ran on marriage. He had never seriously considered it before, and it looked good to him. After all, what a wonderful arrangement it was! You took a fancy to a girl, dodged about to see her and talk to her and kiss her, and all of a sudden society and civilization, which had always had you on a string, so far as she was concerned, turned right round the other way and said—"Now we're going to arrange things so that you can have her all the time—we're organized for that—didn't look at it before that way, did you?—but there it is; we'll tie her up to you so fast that neither of you can ever get away if you want to." There was a curious pleasure in that, as if people had forced one's head into a mass of roses, or driven a goblet of rare wine hard against one's lips. "We'll give her to you, this goddess, to darn your socks and see to the cooking of your food. We'll build houses meant for you and her, we'll consider you and her in the fixing of rents and the pricing of bread. Civilization is meant to give her to you and you to her; that's what it's for. That's how your private little emotions ride to their fulfilment—on the back of the galloping world."

Curious, when you looked at it like that.

Conn went down the path to the boat, pleased with civilization.

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Up in the Residency, Des Roseaux gone, the Commissioner and his Secretary were together. Gatehouse, much the taller man of the two, stood over Blackbury, majestic in his white suit and his folded arms, a little theatrical.

"Sir, can you give me leave of absence for a little?" he asked.

"Leave? Where to, man?"

"Am I obliged to answer that, sir, or may I take a holiday where I choose?"

"Of course you're not obliged to answer. Go where you like—though for the matter of that, there's nowhere to go to. How long do you want?"

"Some weeks, if I may, sir?"

"You'll miss steamer day."

"Do you desire me to stay for it, sir?"

"Dash it, Gatehouse, you talk as if you were Jane Eyre addressing Rochester. I don't desire anything. If you want a holiday, take it by all means. When do you want to go?"

"Tomorrow."

"Right. You might tell the boy to clear away and put out the lamps. Night!"

CHAPTER XI

IN the pearlers' house on the top of Wawaka Island, the little man Fursey and the big man Child were holding converse.

It was a curious place. Not at all what Deirdre, on that night of her visit to Conn's island, had pictured the pearlers' home. A sort of palace was what she had fancied it—white stone, perhaps; display of handsome vulgar things about the rooms—red satin furniture, beds with gilt tops and dusty, coagulated silken draperies, such as she had seen in island hotels of the more pretentious kind. . . .

As a fact, it was not built of stone, iron, or even wood. It was one immense leaf-thatch roof, dark with the smoke of years, angled above a space as big as a barn. That space was floored with white coral gravel, renewed as often as it grew dirty, which threw a faint reflected light from the six great doors, up into the mysteries of the beamed and raftered roof. The walls were bark, panelled between poles. Windows the place had none. Who wished to read or write—occupations not favoured by the folk of Wawaka Island—might go and seat himself near to one of the great doors that were never shut, save in hurricane weather. An ordinary north-wester storm interfered scarce at all with anyone's comfort, the place was so large. Rain might dash in for yards at any opening, without coming near the ring of

men smoking, drinking, or playing cards somewhere towards the centre of the hall.

Once under the roof of Wawaka House, you saw the whole of it. There were no bedrooms; mosquito nets lay piled at intervals, and near them were rough but easy mattresses made by the natives out of trade cottons and the silky fibre of the kapok nut. There was no kitchen; every man kicked his boy to cook his meals when he felt like it, at any one of the cooking fires freely lit on the gravel floor. There was no dining room, since each man fed, like a wild dog of the forests, only as hunger urged him. Hammock chairs of canvas and bush timber stood about the floor, and somewhere near the middle of the huge place, four tree trunks had been driven into the ground, a few planks nailed to their tops, and a few more stumps set in the earth about them. This was the dinner table, seldom used. The pearlers preferred native fashion, and sat on the ground, plate on knees.

It was duskish now, going on to six o'clock, and the boats were in. Most of the day, about the immense reaches of Meliasi harbour, the sloops had been sailing, anchoring and sailing again; the native crews had been diving, hard driven by kicks and curses. They were naked; they streamed with water, and shivered, in spite of the heat. They squatted on the gunwales and drew in long breaths before they went down, panting a good deal, and groaning to themselves. They did not want to dive for the pearlers of Meliasi—was it not known that no native lived more than a year or two at that cruel game?—But they had no choice, for they had been blackbirded by the recruiting schooners and sold, at ten pounds a head, by the captains, on a nominal three

years' "engagement." Blackbury's ceaseless industry in following up and threatening the vessels of this hateful trade, had done some good; it was always possible that a visiting man-of-war would high-handedly confiscate a schooner or two on his report. But enough remained to keep the pearling grounds supplied.

The "boys" had carried up to Wawaka storehouse the great tubs of pearl-shell, roughly cleaned.

The shelling, here, was in no way like shelling as practised in the Paumotus, Thursday Island, or Broome. There, the shell itself was the chief object of the game, pearls, however valuable, being merely an incident. Here in the New Cumberlands, the "lapi-lapi" was of so little value as not to be worth shipping away; pearls were the only things one counted on. They were good pearls on the whole, but not very plentiful. No one on Wawaka had made a fortune. The men of the pearling crowd worked separately; there were a score or so in all, and each owned his boat and his crew. But they had agreements about the partitioning of the different pearling banks, about the sharing out of boys when needed, and especially—for here lay the heart and kernel of the colony—about keeping outsiders away.

Meliasi pearling grounds suited them; the labour was cheap and plentiful, the shell easy to get. Best of all, there was no law. In other places, men could be "had up" for knocking a boy on the head in a drunken fit; for stealing a boy from a village, and keeping him captive; for under-feeding and over-working. Not so on Wawaka. It was an ideal life, to the typical beachcombers who made up Wawaka's colony, and they had agreed—coming together from

various parts of the Pacific—to keep it to themselves. Towards that end, they built their common house, and arranged their laws, Fursey dictating most of them. To the same end, they burned or sunk at anchor the vessels of rivals from any other part of the South Seas; sometimes did worse, as unexplained “accidents” in the bush could testify. It came to be understood, in a year or two, that Meliasi shelling grounds were best let alone. And Wawaka reigned over them in triumph. And over Wawaka reigned Fursey, unchallenged, undisputed, cock of the walk—till the afternoon in Meliasi high street when Conn the Hundred Fighter broke his spurs and cut his comb.

That was near a week past, and Fursey still lay most of the day on his kapok mattress, with a native woman to fan away the flies and bring him drink, whenever he swore at her by way of asking for it. Fursey drank the “King’s Peg”—liqueur brandy and champagne—and it was not good for his wounds, which were neither light nor few, for Conn’s stingaree tail, swung by a practised hand, had left terrible cuts, and the tropic climate, which makes even a scratch perilous unless instantly dressed, had burned them into inflammation before any one thought of taking precautions. So Fursey was bandaged up in many places, and could not move without pulling on a dried and stuck dressing—consequently, could not move without cursing the universe, its author, and most especially Conn.

His mattress was placed somewhat towards the side of the huge building, in the centre of which a dozen men were lying on mats, smoking, talking, and shouting out directions to the boys who, hungry and tired, bent over cooking fires farther away. Some-

one was beating eggs with a loud clatter, in a tin bowl; fish, frying on two or three fires, smelt savoury. A native had just taken off the cover of a camp oven, and the bread sent forth pleasant invitation to hungry men. The owner of the oven, and the friend from whom he had borrowed the flour, were in hot dispute about the ownership of the bread, and blows seemed not far away. Nobody took the slightest notice. Wawaka was well used to shouts and curses—to worse things than either.

"Are you going to have any kai-kai?" asked Child, in his toneless voice. He seemed, after some vague fashion, to have constituted himself nurse to Fursey.

"No," answered Fursey. Commonly he would have tacked comet tail of his peculiar oaths on to such a refusal. Tonight, nothing but the pain following on movement of his limbs extracted curses from him; his ordinary talk was purged of all profane sayings. Child, who knew Fursey better than most, watched him as a man watches a lowering glass in hurricane time. When Fursey's safety valve was closed. . . .

"Call them all here," said Fursey suddenly. "I want to speak to them. You can go." He pushed the fat, cowed-looking native girl, dressed in beads and a fringe of grass, away with his foot. She slunk off, looking oddly back at him. It may have been that Kalaka knew, or guessed, more than anyone supposed. Women are quick. . . .

Fursey was the chief, still, of his clan, although Conn the Hundred Fighter had dimmed the glory of his prestige. Perhaps the pearlers respected less the man they had seen beaten and howling like a dog, in the main street of Meliasi. But they still

feared him. Fursey's salient characteristic—that you never knew what he would do; especially, never could rely on his *not* doing anything on earth or sea—remained unchanged.

They came up, shambling, with the "Pacific slouch" through the growing dimness of the huge white-floored hall. Somebody ought to have lit the hurricane lamps, but nobody had, as yet. The cooking fires flared up and sank, as the wind from the sea swept through the open doors, died down and rose again. The place was like a cave.

"Send the boys away," said Fursey, very quietly. Mac, with the red hair, looked at Smith, who was only a Smith, and kicked him slyly. The kick said, "Something up."

The boys, broken off in the midst of their cookery, hustled themselves away out of the place, chattering like monkeys. A few of them, in the dusk and confusion, snatched at bits of food, and carried them away. The others fought them for it, loudly, outside.

Fursey waited till the snarling and squabbling had gone off towards the huts occupied by the native labour, and then, heaving himself up painfully on one elbow, spoke.

And Child, once a Harrow boy, listening to him, understood, as he had understood before, how it was that the small ruffian kept his hold upon these men; wondered dully, as he had wondered often, where and how Fursey might have taken the wrong turn that led him down the hill. For the man could speak; could throw his personality into his words, and send the words like bullets.

"They'd have liked him on Speech Day. I mean, if he hadn't been a bounder and an outsider. But

he is," thought Child to himself. He looked at his nails, and felt pleased, as far as he had power left to be pleased by anything, with their keeping and their shape.

Furseys was speaking.

" . . . to know once and for all if you're men or mice. How long is it to go on? How long is this white-faced lout who caught me unawares and struck me like a dog, to make game of everyone in the islands? He's to have the fine house and the wines and cigars and the flash furniture, isn't he, and to give himself the airs of a Commissioner at least, and you and I are to live hard and work hard and watch him doing the swell? That's it, isn't it? That's what you like. You've no pride of your own—not you. You don't want the good things of the enough for you. Gold, or something as good as gold, right under your feet, but you don't trouble about that. You're rats. What do rats want with gold? Give 'em a bit to nibble, and a hole to run into.

"And Conn—Conn!" He snarled over the word; he mouthed it as a cat snarls over and mouths a bone. "Conn beats you—yes, I know what you're thinking as well as if you had said it; you're thinking that he beat me. No! that fight's only begun; make no mistake about it. But it never was—on with you. You were beaten before you began. Conn the Hundred Fighter, some fool called him. Well, he's fought all of you, and a few more, and beat you—beat you! So perhaps the name fits after all. You get up a hunt once in a way, and chase him into the bush, and he doubles, and laughs at you. And if it weren't for me, you'd go on with your silly Conn hunts to the end of times. Well! I've done

with them. Done. No more Conn hunts for me."

He paused for a moment. He was an ugly little figure, there in the leaping firelight, leaning on his elbow and looking up at the men. His red moustache stood out as a cat's whiskers stand out; his face, bleached by confinement to the house, seemed boiling at white-heat, so did it simmer and send up bubbles of evil feeling. Fursey knew the effect of the oratorical pause. He gave it full weight before beginning again.

"Now I have to ask you again, are you men or mice, and will you back me out in what I'm going to do? I swear, if you don't it'll be done all the same, and the only difference will be, you'll get nothing out of it."

"Why're you tellin' us, then?" demanded hoarsely, the man called Mac, who had, it may be, a vein of Scotch caution somewhere.

"Because," said Fursey, shutting his eyes, like one weary of men's folly, "it's tiresome having to shoot people, when they get in your way." He opened his eyes again suddenly, and they glared catlike. "But don't you bank on my tiredness."

"What are ye goin' to get us? Conn's stuff?"

Fursey nodded, once, twice, three times. The men drew quick breaths; a little fire of questions broke out. Fursey answered none of them. He only held up his red hairy little hand for silence, and when it was attained, said just two words—

"She knows."

"What, the girl?" asked Child, who had taken no part hitherto.

"The girl."

"Rats. Who'd tell a girl a thing worth thousands?"

It was a small, hairy man who spoke; a Cockney-looking little fellow, somewhat unclean.

"Abstract speculation," said Fursey with a learned air, "has led many away. The question before the meeting is not who would tell a girl, but has anyone told a girl? And to that, gentlemen, I answer without hesitation, 'Yes.' You would ask me"—he was very grand now—"how I know. On the evening when we lost Conn, being at the time hot on the scent, Conn turned up, miles away, with the girl, both of them dirty and tired looking, and left her with the Garberys at the Long Beach. We are not possessed of information"—he was getting grander with every word—"as to where the afternoon was spent. But our informant, one Maraki, who was coming back from a head-hunting holiday in the bush, informs us that the said Conn, when parting with the lady, put his hand over her mouth, as a signal of silence, it being understood, even by the boy, to be such."

The men, standing in slouched attitudes about the coral shale, shifted their feet with a rattling sound, and one burst out "My oath!"

"Very well," went on Fursey, who was beginning to show the effects of the last "King's Peg," "the question is, are we going to stop here pigging along all our lives, with a drunk now and then in Noumea or Sydney, or are we going to make that pasty-faced little Mary tell us? What's a woman anyhow, to stand between twenty men and what they want? What right has she to be dipping her paws in the pie that we've been hunting for years?"

"Hunting a pie," murmured Child dully. "Gad, what a metaphor! See it runnin' its little heart out

through the bush, with a knife and fork stuck in it. Whoop, tally-ho!"

No one took any notice of Child. It was not the custom, on Wawaka, to listen to what other people said, except on rare occasions like Fursey's speech. You talked yourself, and tried to shout down the rest. . . .

Among the pearlers, speech was bursting up like waters held back underneath lock gates, and only now released. "Wants it all for herself, does she, little dear?" "What price us?" "I'm for making her talk." "How will he—" "But if they should—" "Hurray, boys, we'll gut his mine for him!" And over all, like lightning playing above clouds, the flicker of careless oaths that accompanied every speech on the pearlers' island.

Fursey, watching them as a coach-driver watches his team tearing round a difficult corner, saw that the instant had arrived. Child had an odd fancy that he saw a bunch of reins in the hand of the little ruffian, as the latter, leaning from his couch, and scanning the faces of the standing men, gestured fiercely forward, and cried out—

"Then, bullies, I'll tell you how we're going to do it, and if I fail—if I don't set you every one rolling in money within the next three weeks—you can drop me over the edge of Wawaka into deep water, for it'll be all that I'll be good for henceforth!"

A roar answered him.

"Here," said Fursey, tossing them a bottle of his own liqueur brandy, followed by another and another. "Warm your hearts up with that stuff, and let's talk."

.

Dusk deepened into night; the cooking fires, neglected, sank down, under the dark arch of the cave-like roof, from orange to amber, from amber to a pale geranium glow. Nobody lit the lamps; no boys returned to work. The pearling men, bunched by Fursey's bed, heads close together, as if anyone—anyone at all—on the summit of their remote, guarded island, could have overheard them, talked; commented, put questions, and answered them. Despite Fursey's brandy—which was, after all, not much to men accustomed to over-proof rum—their heads seemed clear; they were quieter than ordinary. This was no common game they had set out to play; nor were the stakes a trifle.

And Child, his huge limbs in their coarse khaki clothing doubled up as he sat on the sand, watched and listened and said nothing. Until the end of the discussion, when the men were separating, shouting for their boys, and going back to their neglected meal. Then Fursey turned to him, and said threateningly—

“No funny business from you, mind.”

Child, with his huge arms twisted round his knees, of which the joints stood out like cocoanuts, shook his head.

“Why should she not go to hell like all the rest of us?” he asked.

“What do you mean? I'd have thought you had a fairly comfortable billet here, keeping accounts and so on, and eating your skin tight on next to no work.”

“All the same,” said Child, heaving himself up and making for the corner of the house where his own mattress was spread, “I've been in hell this long time, and I know it.”

"Mad," said Fursey, to the man Smith, who happened to be near.

"I should think so," answered Smith. "Any more of that fine old brandy, chief?"

Fursey, who loved all titles, handed another bottle to him royally, without a word. Smith had one accomplishment—one only—that of grinning and winking with one side of his face, while remaining unmoved as to the other. He did it now.

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To the Residence island, in great state, came that same afternoon Mrs. Carbery, accompanying Deirdre. It was the event of the good woman's life, and it caused heartburnings indescribable among the seven other ladies of Meliasi town. Blackbury had not thought well to ask one as chaperon, although almost any of them would have been better qualified, so far as social experience went, than Mrs. Carbery. But there were difficulties. The wife of the hotel keeper—British—drank. The wife of the hotel keeper—French—was sober, ladylike, even accomplished, but she was only "wife" by courtesy. The wife of the big store-keeper had eight small children. The wife of the small store-keeper had consumption. The wives of one French trader and one English had native blood. The widow of the late captain of a late steamer that had been sunk in Meliasi harbour was partly out of her mind. So there remained only Mrs. Carbery.

They set out from the trading station, not in a canoe this time, but in all the splendours of Blackbury's official whaleboat, with its ten dark oarsmen, clad in blue kilts vandyked with red braid, Fiji pattern, and wreaths of scarlet flowers. The coxswain,

a man of importance, had two wreaths, also thirty-four rings of tortoise-shell in his ears, and a very handsome boar's tusk thrust through the septum of his nose. Mrs. Carbery was dressed in a shot silk of dark green and red, rather like an umbrella, made in the fashion of the year of her marriage. (Her eldest son, if he had lived, would have been fifteen that summer.) She had a bonnet of feathers and jet, and very large white sand-shoes from the store, quite clean and new. Deirdre, in her inevitable transparant black, with a red flower placed cunningly under the brim of the wide black hat that shaded her from the afternoon sun, thought they must make a curiously contrasted pair. She was very Spanish looking that day. Those who knew Deirdre best had said that she always seemed to hark back to her memories of Cordova and Madrid, when she was inclined to flirt.

She was so inclined today. Conn had come over, not as she, and he, had anticipated, quietly for a talk, but in the Commissioner's boat, acting as Blackbury's representative. There had been scarcely any chance of speaking in private, and from what there was Deirdre had shrunk away. Her mood had changed. So long as Conn said nothing, nothing need happen; no decisions need be made. The world was pleasant as it was; why not stay the march of events?

She had discarded, on boarding the island steamer, the plain gold ring she generally wore—which Rogers, by the way, had not remembered to give her; it was a hurried, shamefaced purchase of her own, made in a Continental town. The misunderstanding about her name which had resulted in placing her on the passenger list as "Miss" Rogers suited her

well enough. She was tired of travelling about as a widow. Since it seemed that she couldn't, mustn't, wasn't to tell the truth, it was as well to select the form of misunderstanding that promised the pleasantest results.

Conn, seated in the stern as near Deirdre as he could conveniently get, was not quite sorry to have his proposal put off. The girl couldn't get away, and there was oceans of time—always, in the New Cumberlands. One had time enough for everything, and a bit more to that. No man really likes offering marriage; there is, perhaps, in every male, some drop remaining of the cave-man blood which wordlessly protests against the silly necessity of "asking" a woman at all. And one may always hope to manage the affair without absurd set phrases, if one drifts long enough. So Conn, cheerfully determined on having this girl for his wife, and comfortably sure that she was interested in him, lay back in the whaleboat and looked, with confidence, into a golden easy future that was not there.

They swept alongside the Residency pier, and brought up by the boat steps; Conn handed out the women, and followed them up to the house. The boat boys took his orders as they would have taken Blackbury's own. Not for nothing was he called the "little" king of the islands—a phrase that had no reference, naturally, to his height, which was a comfortable five feet ten.

Mrs. Carbery, her head upheld as ladies in crinoline photographs uphold it, umbrella nursed in one arm, chin drawn in, eyes looking down, came after Deirdre, the picture of faded and out-of-date elegance. She had done her hair better than usual today, but a lock or two braved the wild south-easter

for all that, and her veil was slatting like a flag. So absorbed was she with her "conduct" and her hair and her umbrella and her veil, that she did not notice, until he was right upon her, a man coming down from the Residency, preceded by two or three natives carrying luggage. The man, clearly, had not noticed them coming up. Just here the path took several turns, and one might well be unaware of the presence of anybody else upon it.

"Hallo, Gatehouse," greeted Conn. "Off for your inland trip?"

The Secretary made some indefinite reply, and dashed past with hardly the bow that politeness demanded. "Must be in a hurry," commented Conn. Deirdre said nothing.

But when they got up to the Residency, and had been shown their rooms—two bare, pleasant white painted bedrooms overlooking the tops of the palms and an immense reach of sea—Deirdre, powdering at her glass, remarked through the open door to Mrs. Carbery, "I can't help thinking I have seen that man before."

"Is it the man we seen on the road up, him who leapt past us the way the divil went through Athlone?"

"Yes."

"That one would be to be the Secretary, me gurl. I never seen him, but I have heard spache of him, many's the time, and he does be very great for thramping the bush hither and to, among the neegurs. Me man, he say that Gatehouse is all the wan as the kings they do be having in it, an' he says that if Conn is the 'little king,' the Gatehouse does be the big wan. But that's all their chat, so it is, and I take no heed."

"Gatehouse? I don't remember the name. One meets so many people travelling. I suppose I've run across him somewhere."

Deirdre was unpinning her hair as she spoke, letting loose its dusk curtain over the dressing sacque she had taken from her suitcase. Mrs. Carbery looked at her with an appraising eye.

"Ye'd a right to be wed, an' you twenty-eight; sure, it's almost an old woman you are," she remarked, with a hairpin in her mouth. Her own hair, now under process of reconstruction, was as the thin hill stream to the full river of valley lands, compared with Deirdre's. But there was neither jealousy nor discourtesy in her remark. Deirdre, knowing her own countrywomen, knew the peasant point of view. Mrs. Carbery had been married at twenty-five, amid the loud thanksgivings of a family that had thought her fate past praying for. She was honestly anxious for Deirdre. She had taken a curious, suppressed sort of fancy to her; an echo of her own wrecked maternity—for there had been, and were not, sons and daughters of the Carberys.

Deirdre said nothing at all. She hated lying, much as a cat hates wet. Like the cat, she had been driven into the wet now and again, and hated it all the more for that. And any mention of marriage, in her presence, was like to bring the soil upon her dainty fur again. What could one do?

She was learning—she had learned—through all those interminable seven years, what it cost one to walk against the stream of any common custom or belief. Young, fascinating women couldn't but be married, or . . . the other thing. Probably they were married, or . . . the other thing . . . if they didn't seem to be. Thus public opinion, in

Teneriffe, in Colon, in Tahiti, in New Zealand. And all that Deirdre had to set against it was the tiresome, scandalous, never-believed true story, or the convenient not-quite-believed little lie. And neither saved her, quite. One always walked, bumping, against the crowd, if one stepped off the customary side of the road.

There was Mrs. Carbery, now—she would have to lie to her in another moment. It was like a bad dream, this thing; the sort of dream that one dreams, and waked from for a minute, and then, falling asleep, dreams again and again. She did not like to lie to Mrs. Carbery. She—

The Irishwoman's hair was up, as much as it ever was. She had tidied the fearful lace collar she wore, and was arranging the large bow of red and yellow silk that fastened it. As she pulled out the last loop, she turned to Deirdre, and said—

“Is that right, jewel? Yes? It's a clane pattern, it is. Tell me, daughter of Airyan, where's your husband?”

Deirdre was so taken aback that she could not answer. She felt her mouth dropping open; the hairbrush falling down in her slack hand, by her side.

“Ye have no call to be woild, daughter,” proceeded Mrs. Carbery calmly, “nor ye have no call to answer, if ye rather be keeping it to yourself.”

“How did you—when did you—I mean, I don't understand what you mean,” parried Deirdre desperately. What she now saw with perfect clearness was that she had not meant to tell Conn.

“It kem over me,” was Mrs. Carbery's comprehensive answer. “It be to be coming this long time, I'm thinking, but just now, when I told ye ye had a

right to be wed, it kem like a strong wakeness on me, and I knew it. Sure, that was why the marriage card would nivir come up for ye, daughter. Why would it, and you wed?"

"I'm not," broke out Deirdre determinedly. It was true, essentially—was it not? She had told herself so, many times.

The woman of forty, wife and mother, took the girl lightly by the shoulders, and turned her face to the light. Deirdre winced as two blue-grey eyes, full of women's knowledge, searched her.

"It's true," murmured Mrs. Carbery. "It's true—but, daughter, if it's true, what way is it the cards will not give you the marriage sign, nor the death sign, for married or dead such as you be to be, daughter, as long as there's men in the world that's men?"

Deirdre, under that raking glance, raised one hand, and half awkwardly laid it across her cheek; she did not dare, quite, to cover her eyes. But Mrs. Carbery pounced upon the hand. It was the left. She held it in hers, and scanned the slim third finger.

Now Deirdre had not been wearing her bought wedding ring since she had left Sydney, abandoning, half by accident, her marriage tie. But a narrow ring worn for years leaves traces that do not wear out in a few weeks. Mrs. Carbery dropped the hand, full assurance in her eyes. With the delicacy of her race she asked no further questions, but, adjusting once again her terrible collar, remarked that "by the way the neegurs was smashing cups in the kitchen, it would be to be time for tea."

They went out again on to the verandah, where Blackbury was waiting. Tea was brought; Conn,

who seemed to be making a day of it, appeared from somewhere or other, and drank five cups of tea, one after the other, making it perfectly clear, in a wordless way of his own, that he did this thing because Deirdre was pouring out. Deirdre, on whom the strain of the day was having odd effects, began to feel almost hysterical as she filled his cup again and again. She wanted to laugh, and laugh and laugh—or was it cry? She could not be sure.

Suddenly, in the midst of tea, she felt, with horror, that her eyes were filling with tears. She made an excuse, got back to her room and stood in the middle of it, clenching her hands. The room had four long glass doors, all widely open because of the heat. It gave on the verandah on the inner dining room, on two different bedrooms. Every sound could be heard; every movement she made could be seen, unless she deliberately pulled down the blinds and closed the doors. There is no privacy in tropical houses; you must not be upset, or sulky, in a tropical house; you cannot have a sorrow or a box of chocolates, a joy or a cigar to yourself. Over the open partitions of the rooms, unceiled, through the swung-back, curtained, many doors, will issue forth the scent of your smoke or your sweets, the rip of an envelope, the tearing-up sound that accompanies the writing of love letters. If you fling yourself on your bed, he, she, and they will hear the creak of the mattress. If you lie awake at night, and turn, and sigh, it will be as if you did it in a dormitory, where wakeful ears hear, and curious minds draw conclusions. If you want to be alone, and wish yourself dead, in peace, the mere closing of doors, in a temperature of 90 shade, attracts the attention and amazement of all the house, and invites offers of

quinine bihydrochloride. It is not good to have a sorrow, or a perplexity, in tin houses of Pacific lands.

Deirdre, the sun being almost down, felt there was but one thing to do—get out of doors. She peered through her lace blind, sidewise. Mrs. Carbery, seated very upright, with her hair as spiky as a hedgehog's ("I wonder how she does it," thought Deirdre) was looking out over the blazing green of the harbour; she seemed wrapped in a prophetic trance, but her former guest knew, by experience, that she was nevertheless "all there," and could even see and hear things invisible and inaudible, taking place in the neighbourhood. Conn was staring at the lace blind—she wondered how much he could see. As for Blackbury, that good man, who never drank tea, he had had his two afternoon glasses of beer, and was more than half asleep.

There was a mirror behind the door. Deirdre crept to it, and did the things to her hair that every self-respecting woman does when she has made up her mind. . . . She took her sunshade from the bed—it was a red one, and struck a high note of colour against her black dress. The little Spanish shoes slipped off easily; they were small enough to be carried by their heels in one slim hand. Thank Providence for all those doors; now, down the back steps . . . shoes on. Under the coral tree; people could easily find one there, and the carpet of fallen flowers, thick and red, showed up the black. . . . She could see the picture as if she had had a glass; red, black, and red, under the bare twigs of the tree; behind, a rampart of mangoes, dark green in the waning day. She had stopped thinking now; she was acting by instinct, driven like a leaf on the

wind of some fierce impulse that had awaked when Mrs. Carbery silently turned away with that strange knowledge in her eyes. If she thought at all, it was in broken fragments—"She shall not. . . ."
"I will never. . . ." "Yes, he will! He will!"

There followed a minute of still suspense. Unable to bear any more, she lifted her head, and fluted, in the soft whistle that was scarcely less sweet than her voice, the last lines of "Gypsy Lover!" The tune was haunting, gay, and sad; the words as everyone knew, ran thus—

"Far away, far away, were the hills are calling,
To the open roadway to the roof of heaven's blue,
To the last long camp of all, when life's last dusk is
falling,
Gypsy lover, gypsy lover I'll go with you."

Then she waited. She was quite certain. . . .
Light was failing now. A break in the trees gave her the sun's last gleam, but there was shadow, water-clear and green, as evening shadows are on wooded islands, where the flight of steps came down behind the house. Conn's fair, ruffled head and white coat seemed swimming, in that colourful dusk, as he came to her. When he reached the last drift of pale sun, it was as if he had landed, on a white shore, at her feet!

They looked at each other, and knew it was to be said. Deirdre, who had thrown down the card that every man who respects himself must meet with a higher one—if he is in the game—felt a strange calm descend upon her. For Conn, now, to play. Her mind folded its hands, and watched, almost in-curious.

Conn had turned white, as a man does, in such moments. Before he spoke, Deirdre had time to note the extraordinary depth that his sudden pallor gave to his dark-lashed grey eyes; to see, with a needle-stab of feeling more than half prophetic, that he was young, shingly young, because his years were the same as hers, who was not so very young now—to sense the primitive male's uneasy hatred for the words of slavish petition that customs exacted from him, when all was understood already. . . . Then, frowning a little, looking a little like a lover, and more like a boy repeating a set lesson, he spoke.

"I wanted to say something to you. I wanted to ask you to marry me."

There was just a perceptible pause before she replied—just time to hear the shock of two long waves that broke upon the sand, away below. . . .

"You are doing me a great honour," she said.

"Is that yes?"

"What you like," said Deirdre, flinging her cap over the windmills once for all, and warming the cold words with a look that swept his lips to her, as one meteor, in dark night, sweeps to another, and meets it in a shock of force and flame.

And again, in the silence, two waves burst upon the beach. Louder this time; the night was drawing up wild and dark. There would be lives lost on the reef before dawn, if that dull, warning voice spoke true.

Neither Conn nor Deirdre heard it. They drew apart, and in the settling dusk, looked at each other with new eyes.

"I wanted this," said Conn, "since I came into my house that day and saw you and heard you at

the piano. I said to myself, 'That's Deirdre, and Deirdre is the girl for me.' And you see, she is. I get what I want!"

"I don't," said Deirdre, "unless I pay horribly for it—like the man in the story—what was it?—who got the money because his son was dead." Her eyes grew dark with indefinite fear.

But Conn was cheerily commonplace.

"Oh, you've got nothing to pay for me," he assured her. "Such as they are, the goods don't cost you anything. Send no money. We trust you." He quoted from advertisements laughingly. He hardly knew what he said; he stared at her, seeing new beauties, because she was his—just as you and I see the cottage, the boat, the horse, with other eyes, as soon as the receipt is signed by the seller. . . . Was she not delicate, yet warm—warm as a flower in the sun—this thing of petal and perfume that he had won for his own? . . .

To the girl, however, the sound of his words came chill. "We trust you. . . ." The jest had an edge. He did trust her. It had never occurred to him to do anything else. If he knew—

She stared, intrigued, at his face. What would a man like Conn—a man who wore the steel hand, undoubtedly, beneath the velvet glove—do, if he knew himself deceived? Not, indeed, as men often are deceived by women, but tricked nevertheless. She thought she could fear him, under such circumstances. She knew she could not reckon on his actions. Was there not a spice of cruelty in his dealings with Fursey—though it had been done for her sake? Had she not heard that his natives feared him more than they loved?

Determinedly, she drove her fears away. Who

was to tell him? Mrs. Carbery could not be really dangerous; whatever she might suspect, she knew nothing. There were people in Sydney who had heard her called Mrs. Rogers; the constant commerce with Sydney might make that risky, but after all, she could say she was a widow, as she had always said. Could she not? For all she knew it might be true. Certainly, she was in communication with the asylum doctor, as Shaw had arranged for her, and certainly she had heard nothing at all for two years—but that might mean that Rogers was dead. She strove, in a flash, to believe that it did—knowing quite well, all the time, that it only meant the doctor didn't approve of her, and wouldn't write if he could help it.

In any case, Deirdre, the ever-flying game and quarry of love—Deirdre, half-overtaken once, but never truly captured—Deirdre, for the first time submitting willingly and with whole heart to a lover's kiss—could not feel herself a wife, a fettered woman, whatever her mind might have to say upon the matter. She drove the shadowy thought away determinedly. What was a form of words, to separate her from this man, this strong reality, her own?

She had her hour. Till the stars stood white among the mango tops, the lovers walked, and talked, and told each other all that lovers have to tell. Conn led her, at last, to a high wind-blown point of the island, where, looking dizzily down, she could see, in the starlight, thin lines of foam wrinkling and creeping on a shadowy beach, overswept by palms small as her hands; where, looking on the seas untracked by liners, no man ever came.

"World's end, girlie," he said, pointing out. "Lots of girls say they'd go to the end of the world with their boys, but you've done it. You jumped over the edge when you came to me. You see, Dear—" he had already found her "little name," the name of long ago and home—"there's no going back for me. The Western Islands have me. Does it make you feel cold, all that?" For her hand, close in his, trembled.

"You understand," she said, "it does. It's—it's hard to break in—this air that isn't prepared for us. It isn't us—this country. It hates us; it's lying in wait."

"Yes," he said, looking out, and drawing a long breath. "But you haven't said it. One doesn't; one can't. That's part of it; there are no words for the things it is and does. If one might invent a kind of Esperanto—words for the things we know and can't say."

She laughed the laugh of one who knows. "What would be the use?" she said. "We understand, here, so we don't need the words. And what, do you think, would they mean to people in dear daylight England? We're in a kind of fourth dimension in the New Cumberlands. They don't understand fourth dimension islands, north of the Line."

"It's getting its claws into us," said Conn, looking out and down. "Time to go in."

"Do you feel it?" she asked, leaning close. "Yes, let's get into the little, little places and forget for a minute."

"For a minute," he said, "it wins—some day."

"Is it death you mean?"

"Yes—and other things. Let's come down. I

want you"—they were walking back now, like children, hand in hand, towards the lights, palm-chequered, of the Residency verandah—"I want you to promise me something."

"What?"

"I want you to promise that you'll stop on this island, and not stir off it on any pretense, till I see you again, unless you go with the Commissioner himself."

"But why—why?"

"It doesn't matter why; you'll be promising to obey me some of these days—pretty soon, too. You might as well begin practising a little—Dear!"

Deirdre put up her hand to her flushed cheek, thankful for the shielding dusk. Her independence, the spirit that had carried her, alone and brave, through all the world, seemed to be failing her; and, strangely, she was almost glad it did.

"Yes, I'll promise," she answered him, in a voice she scarcely knew for her own. "What a Griselda I shall be!" was her thought.

"That'll make my mind easy. It's not a place for you to be roaming about by yourself."

"I went and saw some of the villages with the Carberys."

"You had better not. You can go—with me."

"Are you an army in yourself?" she asked playfully.

"I've a pretty tight hold on these natives. And other people!"

"So has Mr. Blackbury's Secretary—what is his name? Gatehouse, I believe."

"Gatehouse," pronounced Conn, "doesn't really understand the New Cumberlands. For a newcomer, he's horribly venturesome. Or rather, be-

cause he's a newcomer. He's a man of big abilities and might do big things with these people, but somehow I fancy he won't. Now don't let's talk of him any more, let's talk of us. I'll have to start off home in another minute. And don't forget your promise."

"I think it's rather unreasonable, you know," qualified the future Griselda.

"Never mind what you think—Dear. You stick to it. Here's the verandah—jammit. I'm not swearing. That path is exactly two inches long. No, I won't come in, it's time for your dinner, pretty nearly. One! One more! *And a tiger!*"

He let her go; he was gone. And Deirdre, flushed, heart running like the tick of a watch, paused for a full minute, in the dark of the mango trees, to recover her composure, and smooth her hair.

Mrs. Carbery asked no question. Blackbury, playing patience, after dinner, while his guests knitted and read, looked at the younger of the two several times from under his heavy brows, but spoke only of the commonplaces of Meliasi life. The evening passed dully. When bedtime came Mrs. Carbery fixed the girl with a ghost-seeing gaze, and faintly ejaculated, "Daughter of Airyan!" as they parted under the verandah lamp. There was a tone of something like dismay in the familiar exclamation—which Deirdre, by now, understood to refer to her nationality, but which carried different meanings at different moments of stress. She did not try to elucidate its meaning of the present. She hurried to her room.

The last thought in her mind, as she fell asleep, was "what would he do if he knew?"

CHAPTER XII

IN the days that followed, Deirdre discovered somewhat to her amazement, that "John Bull" was a very pleasant host.

The Commissioner, like the national type he resembled, was slow to undertake anything, but thorough and efficient in carrying it out once it was undertaken. His official duties being of the lightest, he found time to make excursions, to organize small parties of Meliasi's few respectable residents, to have the Residency island swimming bath put into order, and the Residency tennis lawn fenced in afresh, so that balls, when missed, did not invariably plunge whirling into the Pacific Ocean, a couple of hundred feet below. Deirdre enjoyed all these things, and Mrs. Carbery, whether she enjoyed them or not, went through them determinedly, and held her own with surpassing coolness, never put out by any of her numerous false steps on the slippery ground of social etiquette.

They went, in Blackbury's official whaleboat, to the dancing ground again, guarded by his armed boat's crew; they walked through the avenue, examined the weird figures, and shuddered at the gruesome braining stones. Deirdre thought of nothing so much as the secret hidden beyond the shell-heaps outside; she could hardly believe she had really seen the place sought for with so much fury, year after year, by the whole white population of

the New Cumberlands, and that no one even suspected her knowledge. . . . In which last conclusion she was, as we know, wrong.

Mrs. Carbery, parasol above her head, skirt half trailing, half held up, deportment dignified in the last degree, and hair partly down, paraded the avenue as if it had been the approach to the Vice-regal Lodge. She was gratified by seeing it under such distinguished conditions; gratified also that she should see it at all.

"Carbery, he said time and again, that if I was to lay toe upon the place, and I not having ten men with me, and they having guns, it would be roasting my liver they would be before the night was in it," she declared, peering, with much satisfaction up at the face of a red-tongued demon who held both hands tight on his stomach, in an attitude suggestive of green apples for lunch.

"My good lady," remonstrated the Commissioner, with some asperity, "you seem to think that there's no law and order at all in the country. We do try to keep up a little. Miss Rogers can tell you that she came down this very walk quite safely, alone, in the middle of the night."

"Whethen, Your Exshellenshy, she did not," countered Mrs. Carbery briskly, "for there was a white man in it with her, wan that they do be calling the little king of the counthry, after Your Exshellenshy, who's the big one."

"Is that the case?" asked Blackbury curtly. Deirdre knew him well enough to be aware that he felt a point of honour involved. She was about to answer, without much thought, "Oh, Mr. Conn didn't find me till I'd been here quite a while"—but checked herself.

Was it well to say anything at all about the incidents of that afternoon?

"Well?" asked the Commissioner.

"Mr. Conn did take me to Mrs. Carbery's," answered Deirdre slowly. She was about to add something—she did not quite know what—when her eye was caught by a slight movement, or so it seemed to her, of one of the figures in the long row of carved and painted horrors; a large figure, set in an unusually large shrine. Instantly she became certain that there was something—someone—concealed there. Also, that no one but herself could, in all probability, be made to believe it.

She walked, casually, but with jumping heart, to the figure. It was like all the rest—a half-filled-in sentry-box with a hideous wooden god occupying the upper half, and a great bird crouching on the top. There might or might not have been room for a man hidden underneath and behind the god. Impossible to know—unless one had the whole thing knocked down and smashed, and here, in the New Cumberlands, that would mean something very like suicide. Impossible to make anyone understand what she thought she had seen—she could hardly have told herself. Had she been so sure? She almost wavered. . . . Anyhow, a native might—

Then, slowly, certainly, there came to her nostrils a single whiff of an odour that was the odour of no native—a suggestion of garlic and cigarette. . . . It was gone almost before she had perceived it. Mrs. Carbery, eager to look at the next figure, which was a smiling one, pulled her on. Had she fancied it? She knew she had not. But she was certain no one would agree with her. Silence was

best, after all, if some white person had hidden himself—to spy.

With a shock it came to her that Conn had been right, entirely right, when he extorted from her that promise not to leave the island unaccompanied. She could not suppose the unseen watcher was dogging Mrs. Carbery—or the Commissioner. The latter, indeed, might have been found alone, without even a native escort, often enough, had anyone desired; Blackbury did not trouble about taking an armed boat's crew with him when he had no ladies in charge.

Then, it followed that if someone were spying, that someone had his attention fixed on her. Why? She could not imagine, but she did not like it. She kept very close to Blackbury and his big-muscled, dark-brown, savage-looking "boys," on the way back to the boat.

In the days that followed—the days that, Deirdre dreamed, would stretch on and on into a lifetime—Conn came often to the Residency island. He was always welcome there; Blackbury made no secret of the fact that he liked the "little king" better than his own secretary, and would have been glad to make an exchange, if Conn had seen the matter in his way. But Conn did not. He served no man.

He served one woman—the first, apart from those light loves that had left no mark on his life; the last until that life should end. This he thought, as Deirdre thought the days in Meliasi were but the first in a long, unbroken string of pearls, stretching away and away into the unknown years beyond; breaking, and spilling their light upon the earth, only when the cord of life should be broken too. . . .

He was a royal lover. Deirdre found herself say-

ing, again and again, after another of his brief visits to the island (for they always seemed brief, even when they stretched over an afternoon or an evening) that he was too good to be true. She had had man's love enough in her life to know how surely its honey is mixed and flavoured with the bitter herb of selfishness. Only in Conn's love did there seem to be none. He spoke scarcely at all of himself, his aims, his present, his past, and very much of her. He wanted to know the least things about her life—how she had spent her time as a girl in that long-forgotten home, where she had studied music, how it came that she understood the Latin of the coat of arms he showed her, one day, engraved on an old book-plate.

"*Candide et constanter*"—a punning reference, instantly grasped by her and quickly translated as "Spotless and steadfast." ("You don't need the adverb," she commented.)

"Free," he said, "free, but I like it! Of course no one could live up to such a piece of swagger. What is yours? I know the crest of several Rogers; they seem to run to griffins and—" "What's the matter?"

For Deirdre had suddenly flushed scarlet, and then turned very white. How was she to tell him her crest?—A rose above the brief motto, Norman French, "Sans Epines." (Thornless.) Without the name, it had no meaning. She felt herself on the verge of a precipice. . . . As to Rogers' crest, she had never thought of it.

But Conn translated her embarrassment simply enough.

"Everybody hasn't got a crest, and they are things that don't matter a scrap anyhow," he said. "Do

excuse my gassing; I thought perhaps you were interested, as it'll be yours." He turned the subject away. "What if we walked under the mango trees for a while?" he said. "It'll be cooler than the verandah."

She went with him; they were openly affianced now, and no one might say them nay. But the day was poisoned for her. Under the fiery green of the mango domes, where the wind from the sea rushed through, and the sound of the sea came up from far below, and sea-birds, white and dark-green winged, fled by in the glimpses of sun outside, they walked, and sat, and walked again, and Conn told her how he had looked and waited for her all his eight and twenty years, and found her at last. He told her how he had been building his house, gathering his money, for her, knowing that she must come; how it was for her that he had kept his peace about the treasure cave on the mainland of Meliasi, and refused to let anyone share in it, even those he knew to be in need.

"I am no general philanthropist," he told her. "Let those carry out the rôle whom it suits. I look after my own."

He told her how he had loved her music long before he ever saw or dreamed of seeing her; how he had read her soul in it; how he thought her like a lily—a lily with a heart of fire. She, drinking in his words as a creature athirst, felt them bring no coolness to her burning lips—today. What would he call her—he, who lived "*Candide et constanter*"—if he knew?

All the more for the uncertainty, she loved him. She loved him so that she could not listen to what he said; she seemed to dream away, after a moment,

into thinking of him, not of his words, no matter what he spoke about. Out of one of these strange trances she was plucked by a word almost shyly spoken, with a half laugh accompanying it.

" . . . Wedding. What about it, girly?"

She did not know what had gone before. She stammered and hesitated in replying.

"When—what—" she faltered.

"I said, what about our wedding? Quiet, of course—I know you'd rather not have feathers and fuss. Would next week suit you?"

"Next week?"

"Any objections? There's going to be a man-of-war in. It might be as well to be married on her. You see, the queer state of this place—neither British nor French, nor anything else—makes the laws a bit dicky, and one doesn't want to have any uncertainty about the legality of the business. But on a King's ship, it's British, wherever you go. And there's a chaplain, of course. Or what do you say?"

"Would it be quite—quite usual?" asked Deirdre in a low voice, looking at her small red Spanish shoes, as she walked. Her mind was in a turmoil.

What she really wanted to ask, yet could not ask, was whether the usual question about obstacles would be put. She knew she could nerve herself—and her conscience—to go through with the ceremony—all but that. She feared for herself, when it came to that solemn pause. She might cry out, or burst into tears, or run away. Or—worst of all—break down and tell the truth.

"It wasn't a marriage," she repeated, obstinately. "It hadn't even the vows and promises. Nothing but taking each other for man and wife—and that fat old man, sleepy with the porter he'd had for

lunch, writing it down, and the two clerks yawning and staring. How can that—"

But Conn was answering.

"You mean, of course, is it legal," he said. "Don't worry your small head a moment. It's as legal as if the Archbishop of Canterbury and six clergy tied the knot. You'll never get away from me again, even if you want to." The idea seemed to please him.

"I suppose you don't believe in divorce?" ventured Deirdre. She had always cherished a spark of hope that somehow or other. . . .

Conn frowned a little; the lover-light died out in his eyes, and an expression almost husbandly took its place.

"My dear child," he said, "do talk about what you understand. What do you know of divorce?"

"Nothing," answered Deirdre hastily. ("All the same," she thought, "this is the twentieth century, and we don't go about with blinkers on now-a-days.")

"I should suppose you didn't. But I'll give you my ideas, if you want them. It should be allowed, for the usual causes, which won't ever concern you and me, and for another—but that needn't be gone into."

"What is it?" demanded Deirdre. Somehow, she thought she knew.

Conn seemed to answer somewhat under protest.

"They altered the law. They used to have it retrospective long ago, when a man married. But one can't— Never mind those ugly things, little sweetheart. I've got something to give you." He pulled out a tall Spanish-shaped hair comb, carved of solid mother-of-pearl, and exquisitely set with the

sea cat's-eyes that are found in island lagoons—strange things of blue and green, large as a shilling.

"I didn't dare to make it pearls," he said, "for fear someone might see them, and get to drawing conclusions. But you wait and see the necklace you're going to have—one of these days. I've been matching pearls for it for years."

The comb had to be put in place; the giver had to be thanked for it, and paid for it. Deirdre, leaving her lover, as she always did, with lips throbbing, and heart on fire, could find no leisure in her soul for thought until long after his steps had died on the track, and the oars of his boat beaten away into the distance. Later, the memory of his words returned to her. She knew what he had meant, when he spoke of obsolete laws. He was thinking of the old-time law that separated for ever a man from the woman who, coming to him, had deceived him.

"But I should not deceive him!" she cried to her soul. And her soul, bitterly, answered her, "Would he ever believe that?" "Adrian Shaw did," she told herself. "Adrian Shaw!" answered her self. "A man of the world, trained in divorce-court evidence, and not—*not*—so very much in love that he couldn't marry someone else a few weeks after. He was a lantern to this man's flame. You can't reckon Conn-interims of Adrian Shaw."

She could not rest; she dared not think. It was growing late in the afternoon; the sun was off the water. She called Mrs. Carbery, and went down, accompanied by the Irishwoman, to Blackbury's bathing pool.

In the sunset light, it was glorious there. A swimmer might have found fault with the extent and depth of the pool—Deirdre, in fact, being a

good swimmer, did so criticize it—but nothing lovelier could have been dreamed of, or made, by Nereids or fairies. Larch-green in colour, the seawater, let in through tall brown piles, sipped and swayed against its tiny shore of pure white sand. Somebody, long ago, had gathered big shells from the reef, and set them on this little beach, where they would not naturally have been found.

The sun and the wind had bleached them all to a uniform, dazzling white; there they lay, shaped in a score of different ways, horned, deep-lipped, fluted, set with teeth like combs, beautiful ghosts of shells, passing a still, old age in this tideless prison, far from the tumble and the surf of the blue-white reefs beyond. Over them trailed long arms of pink-blossomed convolvuli and spider lilies shook tall blooms behind. The walls of the swimming pool, made of piled white coral, were painted with vivid petals. That long-ago owner of the island had searched the seaward forests for plants that would grow near salt water; his gleanings shone all round the pool in fresco-work of flowers—curved horns and censers, blue as Meliasi harbour; trumpets of waxy gold; a rain of dropping scarlet, a Milky Way of white. In the unstirred green water, they were reflected as in a glass; and among the pictured flowers, below the real ones, swam little fish of sapphire colour, of barred black and gold, of green and blue striped with rose and geranium colour, so that you scarcely, on a clear still noontide, could tell which were the fish, and which were the flowers.

This sea-fairies' home was closely shut in by its own walls of coral, and by a thicket of mangroves growing right in the tide-water. At no time could it be seen from outside, save at the one narrow point

where the water of the lagoon rose up at high tide, and filled the little pool to over-flowing, leaving it, hours later, half-way down its own sandy, weedy bed. Just here, there was a fascinating glimpse of real deep water, neither green nor blue, filled with promise of all coolness and of laving tides. But Mrs. Carbery, and also the Commissioner, had warned Deirdre not to let herself be tempted over the safe shelter of the fence of piles. Sharks had never been seen there, but they might be seen at any time, and the Meliasi shark was the "tiger" kind, large and fierce, and not to be trifled with. Deirdre, who knew the South Seas much too well to think in earnest of risking herself beyond the fence, nevertheless chose to grumble a little, on this especial afternoon. It had been very hot; the shallow pool, eighty degrees or over most of the day, had not had time to cool. One might as well have stayed up on top and had a hot bath in one's own room, fretful Deirdre maintained. She did not like the pool as well as she had thought she did. It was all very well to look at, but one wanted to swim—to get a long stretch of the "crawl" at high speed, or to climb on something and dive. She would get out and sit on the coral; it was cool there, now that the sun was going down, and Mrs. Carbery might as well come too.

Mrs. Carbery did, emerging from the bright green water in her pre-historic serge gown, like some strange monster cast up at neap tide. Deirdre, in a smart "Canadian" of black knitted silk, a red handkerchief on her head, felt as before, that she must offer a remarkable, and not, from her own point of view, an unpleasing contrast. She lit a cigarette, and rather wished that Conn were within

sight of her, instead of being, by now, a couple of miles away.

The last thing she suspected was that he happened, at that moment, to be within twenty yards of her, resisting, with considerable strength of mind, the temptation to play Peeping Tom that had assailed him, when he heard the splashing and talking in the pool. He was far from expecting to meet Deirdre down there, at that hour of the evening. His own presence was a simple matter enough; it was due to the sighting, from his boat, of a big stingaree in the water not very far from the inlet to the pool, and his determination to get the thing speared by his boys, lest by any extraordinary chance it should find its way, gliding between the piles, into the nook where Deirdre was in the habit of bathing. The fish, however, had betaken itself to deep water at once, and shown no sport. Conn meant to hang about for a few minutes before starting again, just in case the stingaree might once more lift an ugly fin out of the water, or lash with its cruel tail.

Meantime, he sat in the stern of his whaleboat, watching the water, and thinking of nothing in particular. The voices from the pool woke him out of his vague reverie.

"Little Dear and her dragon," he commented. "I'd give a good bit to be looking through those confounded mangroves, somewhere safe. It isn't done, of course. Quite a lot of nice things aren't done; quite a pity, too. Daresay," the young man's thoughts ran candidly, "she's dressed a good deal more than she'd be at a dance, anyhow." He waited, scanning the sea. "I don't think it's going to shore again," was his regretful thought.

At the edge of the pool, Deirdre and Mrs. Car-

bery, cooling themselves in a drift of evening breeze, talked.

"Girl," said Mrs. Carbery, imparting a curious flavour of dress and drawing room to the interview, by sitting very upright in her dripping serge, and holding her chin well down, as a refined lady should do—"girl, I cut the cards for ye last night, and I seen throuble in it."

"Did you?" countered Deirdre politely. "I hope it wasn't much."

"There bid to be a fair man that will cause ye sorrow, jewel, and another fair man to that. It's the wonder of the world, the way them fair men do be harassing ye. And there's a journey across the wather, and a man from over the says."

"We're all from over the seas here," objected Deirdre frivolously. Mrs. Carbery flowed on. "I drew it down that there was misfortune an' all the misfortunateness was workin' about the card that means a weddin' ring. Disthress an' sipiration an' all manner. An' all of it, girleen, it was contagious to that card. Sure, Deirdre daughter, ye will nivir be for weddin' a man that will be bringin' all that upon ye. Sure an' all, I have been feeling in me heart there was no luck about the thing at all."

Deirdre, reclining slim-legged, black-bodied, among the trailing flowers, bit off the head of a small white bloom, and made answer, slowly—

"You know, dear Mrs. Carbery, I don't believe—much—in cards and fortunes—though it's very kind of you to take so much trouble."

Mrs. Carbery paused for a moment, sitting straighter than ever; she seemed all straight lines, with her Noah's Ark blue gown, and her hair, streaked into long tails by the water, and her thin

arms set down by her sides, palms resting on the rock.

"I didn't tell all of it that there was in it," she breathed. "Do you choose I would tell you?"

Deirdre, who would have given worlds to say "No," felt nevertheless constrained to reply, politely, "Yes, do." She was quite aware that Mrs. Carbery, at times, hypnotized herself into believing that the ambiguous signs of the "cards" she worshipped were responsible for ideas that had, in reality, some other origin. She dreaded the next thing the Irish-woman might say.

"Daughter of Airyan," proclaimed Mrs. Carbery, "the thing I did be findin' has me clean desthroyed thinkin' of it, when I'd be awake in my bed of a night, and it dark, and there to be a shmall, wicked talkin' in the say, down an' under. The hair of me head crep' when I thought of it. Daughter, it was two weddin' rings I saw, not wan, and they was all through other together."

"Two wedding rings!" laughed Deirdre in a high, unnatural voice. "How very amusing!"

Mrs. Carbery lifted eyes, green-grey, heavily black-browed, that saw through and through her little attempt at evasion.

"Ye will never be for marryin' one man, an' you wed to another?" she said, with an immense simplicity.

"Who told you I was ever married?" was Deirdre's last frantic double.

"There bid to be some myshtery in it, I know well," Mrs. Carbery answered. "A girl ye are, yet a married woman ye are, if the cards tells true. But whether an' all, ye'd no right to be weddin' a man who knows no more than the lamb unborn."

"How do you know I didn't—" began Deirdre, and broke off hurriedly. Mrs. Carbery did not pounce upon the admission; it told her nothing new. She only looked at Deirdre with her green-grey, prophetess eyes, and leaned upon her hands, waiting. Deirdre broke through the situation with a violent effort.

"Where's my cloak? Oh, here—it's getting too cool altogether to be sitting wet through any longer. Won't you get yours and come up? You don't want to get an attack of fever any more than I do. Let me—" She had picked up Mrs. Carbery's worn ulster, and was throwing it round the thin shoulders underneath the serge gown. "Now mine." She flung her wrap of brown towelling, red-edged with braid, about her; slipped on her shoes, and led the way up the steep track to the Residency at such a pace that Mrs. Carbery, older by more than a decade, could hardly follow. Speech was for the moment impossible. When they reached the Residency verandah, they hurried to their rooms, dripping along the floors as they went. Deirdre, in mortal fear of further talk—for all that she had made up her mind to tell nothing, nothing whatever—kept ahead of Mrs. Carbery, and fairly bolted into her own room. A cool, deliberate sentence followed her—

"That would be to be a boat we heard, and we coming up the avenyey."

"Yes," gasped Deirdre, shutting the door. What did a boat, or a hundred boats, matter to her? . . .

A good part of the night she lay awake, thinking matters out. Her room was dim and quiet; the evening battalion of mosquitoes hummed for some hours outside her close-tucked net, subsiding, towards dawn, into deceptive quiet. A painty-green

frog as big as a pigeon, attracted by the night light, posted himself on the edge of the water-jug, and now and then broke out with a single, discontented, "Roke! roke!" Otherwise, stillness lay upon the house and island; she could not even hear the breathing of sleepers in adjoining rooms, as usual. Mrs. Carbery, for all her prophecies and alarms, seemed to be resting peacefully; so, big John Bull, not a yard away from her, as her bed was placed; so, the house boys who slept, for prudence's sake, on the verandahs with sawed-off shotguns ready to their hands. Nobody was troubling; nobody cared. Only she was awake, and miserable.

She could not disguise from herself, now, that her love was endangered. Mrs. Carbery knew nothing, but, aided by her never-to-be-sufficiently-cursed fortune telling cards, and the fancies they produced, she had come so near the truth at a guess, as to leave Deirdre no hope save in outright black lying, and that, never having allowed herself more than little grey evasions that surely hurt no one, she was very loth to face.

Yet, if she did not face it, she might lose Steve. It would be easier, she felt, to die,—if death could be met with him. She understood, now, the story of the Crown Prince Rudolph that had so intrigued her school-girl days—other stories, running on the same strange, wild lines, that had seemed to her exaggerated, absurd. She knew why lovers chose to die together.

But there was no question of that. No question, either, of any trouble at all, if she could only keep a "stiff upper lip," and deny anything and everything. It was, she was quite sure, the kindest course for Conn himself. If she were in such a position, she

would much rather not know anything that could break up her happiness. Conn had strong feelings and passions. To hear of an obstacle—an insup—well, an obstacle—the very week before his wedding day, would break his heart, and drive him to despair.

The night waned. John Bull, feeling the chill of the hours that verged on dawn, moved restlessly on his creaking spring stretcher, and snorted twice or thrice in a half snore, almost awake. Mrs. Carbery, on the other side of Deirdre's room, began to talk in her sleep, murmuring something that was part prayer, part remonstrance, addressed to Heaven knew whom. The painty-green frog, disturbed, lifted his head in the dusk of breaking day, and called restlessly, "Roke, roke, caroak, caroak!" Australian jackasses, in the tops of the cocoanut palms, began the ugly note they use in the islands, "Rawk, rawk, ronkey, ronkey, ronkey!" A small thing with a silver whistle woke up to say that the world was good, and the sun undoubtedly rising. On the verandah, groans and scufflings, as the light grew clear, betrayed the foot of the native "boss boy."

"Rousing each caitiff to his task of care."

It was another day. With the day, came to Deirdre firm resolve. She could keep her secret, and she would.

In the New Cumberlands, as in other Pacific islands, there are long stretches wherein nothing happens at all; days when everyone, contentedly, does nothing from morning until night. This was such a day. Blackbury had made ready all his mail for the expected man-of-war, that might, and might

not, call within a week; Mrs. Carbery had finished the last of the colossal socks belonging to her husband, which she had brought with her for darning. Deirdre had never anything to do but a little sewing, or a little composing, and she did not feel in tune for either, today. She did as the rest did; as Des Roseaux, who had wandered in, did also. They sat on the front verandah, talking until it was time for the eleven o'clock tea that is a sacred institution in Pacific lands; then, as the sun was beginning to beat hotly, they moved to the back verandah, which looked west, and talked again. Then Mrs. Carbery wandered with trailing skirt off to the kitchen to see that the boys were cooking lunch, and returned with the intelligence that they were, but that she had had the "divil's" delight getting that young tory of a cook boy to quit out of it, and leave her to mix the pudding with her own ten fingers; signs on it, he had been eating a snake, away and under the house, and he had the smell of it still on him. Nobody made any comment on this typical happening, but Blackbury, Deirdre, and Des Roseaux immediately broke, one after another, into illustrative anecdotes, and by the time the anecdotes were done, the lunch, with its rescued pudding, was on the table and the day half over.

Des Roseaux melted away by and by, and Blackbury went off for his afternoon sleep. Deirdre, who wanted nothing less than a *tete-à-tete* with Mrs. Carbery, fled to a side verandah where no one, almost, ever sat, found herself a long chair, and settled down for a quiet afternoon. It was scarcely three o'clock; visitors were rare, and none, in any case, need be expected for at least an hour. She had, in all probability, four hours of uninterrupted peace

before her; even Steve was not likely to come today, since he had been to the Residency the day before. There was a murmuring of music in her ears, this last hour or so; a dancing and beating of swift, sweet measures. If she had the afternoon entirely to herself—with the piano in the sitting room at hand—she did not know but she might—

Why, that was Conn's whaleboat—surely—creeping over, like a many-legged water-beetle, from distant Wawa Island. It could be none but his or Des Roseaux's, and Des Roseaux had only just left the Residency. Deirdre swung her feet off the long chair, and ran to Blackbury's telescope stand. Yes, it was Conn. She could see the white figure in the stern, and recognize the uniform of the crew—dark blue jumper and tunic, with a sash of emerald green.

There was, of course, only one thing to do—hurry into the bedroom, hunt out a lacy, cloudy dress with graceful hanging sleeves, pat the dark-bronze masses of hair into more perfect form, and add a touch, a very discreet touch, of Deirdre's own particular lilac perfume. She always used a delicate lilac, when she used any scent at all—on the grounds that she was "simply sick" of violet, in books and out of them.

The side verandah would do. It was quiet. . . . Was it not delightful of him to come all those miles again so soon? But there never had been, there never would be, a lover like Stephen Conn. More than ever, the urge of music, not yet formed or expressed, swelled like a tide in her heart. She found herself humming fragments as she moved about her room—a first line, words and music, as she twisted up her hair; a refrain, suddenly leaping into life complete as she fastened the last snap of her prettiest dress. It was going to be "some song," this

latest born of hers. She hadn't written one for months, but this would make up. The last phrase sounded in her ears as she closed her door, and stepped out on the verandah to see whether the boat had yet come under the lee of the island. . . . Oh, it would be a splendid song!

Yes, the boat had evidently come in; it was not to be seen. In another two or three minutes, she would hear Steve Conn's step—his unmistakeable, light swift foot—coming up the crackling coral walk. She would catch the first glimpse of the hard, strong face, that softened only for her, the diamond-grey eyes beneath the eaves of the big sun helmet, before he caught sight of herself; she would look through the chinks of the bamboo sun blinds, and laugh to see him scanning the front of the house, wondering where she might be. . . . Only another minute now at most. Only half a minute. Now—now. Surely that was his step—was it? Someone, undoubtedly, was coming up the walk—oh—a native. A native—with a note.

She was not vexed, not alarmed. There was no reason for either. The note might be for anyone; might mean anything or nothing at all. . . . But somehow, mysteriously, the pace of things seemed to have slowed down. The world was rushing no longer. It crept.

The note was for herself. The boy was one of Conn's.

She met him at the steps, took the letter from him, and went into her room to open it. She did not feel frightened—not at all—what was there to be frightened at?—But, oddly, her knees seemed to be frightened. They shook. She was amused at her knees. . . .

She opened the letter. The envelope had been gummed down closely; it wouldn't tear at first. She had to get a hatpin from the dressing table. Then she saw that her hands were frightened. They were trembling, and looked cold. But she was quite calm.

The letter was very short; she seemed to read it all at once, in a single look. But she could not understand it.

"Will you come down to the boathouse if you can? I want to talk to you. S. CONN."

The boy, outside, asked if he was to wait. "No," she called, and he went away.

What did it mean? She laid the note down on the dressing table, and looked at it. It seemed as if she could not stop looking at it. Her hat was hanging on the mirror; she pinned it on, all the time staring at the note, so that she ran the pin into her head, and hurt herself. She snatched it out, and replaced it, glancing at the glass this time. The girl in the glass stared hard and strangely; her eyes seemed very big, but that was because her face had turned so white. Why was she looking like that?

. . . There was gravel under her feet—coral gravel. The wind from the sea blew up into her face, and ruffled her dress. She held it against the breeze. It was a windy-gold afternoon, full of the calling, insistent life that is nowhere so inescapable as about the tropic world. A day to live in; a day to meet good fortune with a smile and outstretched hands. The day when she and Conn had pledged their love had been a day of brooding storms; dusk coming down with a cruel face and angry muttering cries. She did not know why she thought of it. She could not catch the consoling analogy she

wanted, though she felt, dimly, that it was there. She could only hasten down the coral path to the boathouse, thoughts tumbling and tripping over one another. Why had he not come up to the house? Why had he written such a letter? . . . That was a huge butterfly! It must be as big as a swallow—red spots on its wings—they did not often come to the island. . . . Conn's boat—lying out from shore—now, the boathouse, standing alone, on a space of sun-caked sand. . . . They must have put it there to be safe from fire; odd, she had never thought of that. A quiet place. A place where there could be no eavesdroppers. Up on the top of the island, among the shrubs and trees, one never knew. . . . Was that the reason? And if it were, yet why—Oh—there he was, under the black-silk shadow of the bathhouse roof. Sitting on the edge of Black-bury's drawn-up whaleboat. He did not see her; she could not see his face, because his helmet was on. . . .

Conn, under the boathouse roof, heard the light, hurried footsteps coming. Instantly he rose, and took off his sun helmet.

"I must apologize," were the first words that she heard. "I shouldn't have brought you down here if it could have been helped. I wanted to talk quite privately."

"Yes," she said, swallowing down something in her throat. They stood and looked at one another. Conn was so deeply tanned that no pallor could show on his hard face, but his lips, commonly red, were yellow-white. She noticed that. "Something dreadful is going to happen," she thought.

"Will you sit down?" he said, offering his hand to help her into the whaleboat. He was terribly

polite. He had not asked to kiss her; his hand—that hand that had been used to cling to hers as steel leaps and clings to the magnet—barely touched her, as he lifted her by the elbow. He did not sit down himself. He stood beside the whaleboat, on the sand, not very near to her. She had never before realized his height—his strength. He made her feel like a “reed shaken in the wind.” . . .

“This is not Steve,” she thought. Her woman’s soul ached for her protecting lover. This steel-eyed judge who stood aloof—who was he?

“I wanted to tell you something,” were his first words. They gave her a shock of surprise. She had thought—oh—he was going on.

“I wanted to let you know I was in my boat, last evening, when you and Mrs. Carbery were bathing. I heard a good deal of what you and she said. I wish to apologize for doing such a disgraceful thing.”

He paused for a moment, evidently collecting his words.

“It was a temptation—I didn’t think I could have—but that doesn’t matter. We can assume I’m a cad if you like. It can’t alter what I heard. What did she mean—that woman—by saying you were married? Is it true?”

She would have given ten years—anything—to be able to lie. She had lied before—she did not palter with herself, now, by calling it evasion, fibbing. But to Conn, had her life been forfeit, she could not.

“Yes,” she said, and seemed to hear the word explode like dynamite, shattering her world.

She had been mistaken, it seemed, in thinking that Conn’s burned skin could show no change of colour.

It changed now, to a dusk, ugly yellow. He looked, all in one moment, like a man who has been sick a week.

"Is your husband alive?"

"Yes." (She knew he was. The doctor would have told her. . . .)

"When did you hear of him last?"

"Two years—let me speak, Steve. I must speak."

"You can speak when I'm done. I want to know how you dared."

"I—dared? I don't—"

"Yes, you do. You understand quite well. I want to know what made you think I was going to commit bigamy for any woman alive. What had I ever— Good God, and I thought I wasn't worthy to touch your dress!"

"Oh, you won't listen, and you don't understand," cried Deirdre, fighting back tears. "It was a—it was only a—"

"Was it a legal marriage? Church or registry?"

"It was registry."

"And you never had a divorce?"

"No—no. There wasn't—"

"Had you thought of getting one? Not that I—but there would have been some excuse."

"Why, no, Steve. Steve, don't look at me like that. I've done nothing. No, there was never any chance of a divorce. It wasn't a real marriage, it was only a student marriage—like Sonia Kovalovsky—"

"Who?"

"The Russian mathematician, you know. She—"

"I don't know. I don't take any interest in Nihilism. I don't see what it's got to do with you and me. You let me ask you to marry me, and ac-

cepted me, and we were to have been—" He stopped and seemed to fight for self-composure. In a moment he went on—she had not dared to interrupt—"And you meant to make my sons—my sons!—you meant to make them—" He hesitated over the word, so seldom used before a decent woman. Deirdre, seizing the opportunity, broke in. She was crying now, her breast heaving, tears running down, but Conn did not even seem to see it.

"You're cruel—you beat one down. You must listen." She was almost choking with tears. "Steve—why won't you understand? It was to get my property—and he only did it—to help—and he left me as soon as the register was signed. And I—"

"You want me to believe that—that the man who married you went off and deserted you as soon as it was done?"

"Yes, yes, Steve. It was—"

"And that you never saw him since?"

"Yes," said Deirdre, stopping her tears. Was there—could there be—hope?

"You can tell that," said Conn, his face yellow-white with fury, "you can tell that to the marines."

He turned his back on her, and went with great steps across the sand, down to the spot where his boat was lying in the tide. She could not believe that he was going—like that—without a word. She could not believe it even when she saw him swing into the boat, and order the boys to shove away. He would turn—come back. . . .

He did not. The crew, sensing something unusual and dangerous in the air, reached out over their oars and pulled as if contesting a race. The whaleboat left a creaming wake behind it, on the glass-green of the lagoon. Soon it looked like a

pointer—a long thin pointer, showing the way to the passage in the reef. The boat nosed straight for the break in the tumbling foam, took it, and was away, rocking, on the open sea.

Deirdre found she was on the beach; she had no recollection of getting out of the boat or leaving the boathouse. There was an immense calophyllum tree near her, rooted in sand, and spreading its enormous arms, each one a separate forest, out above the water. Flowers, white and golden, exquisitely scented, fell into the tide at her feet, and came swaying back on the fringe of each long ripple. "I shall never like them again," she thought, looking at the lovely things with a cold sick feeling. Steve was gone; Steve who had been hers. What was to do? God, God, what a night she was going to have!

It was near sunset now. She did not dare venture into the house; she felt as if going mad. She would take her bathing suit from the back-yard, and slip down to the swimming pool; that would be a good way of escaping from eyes and tongues—for the present. After—oh, how was she going to face dinner? How spend the awful night, in that room she hated so? "Roke, roke!" She could hear the horrible green frog, hiding among the basins—could imagine the muttering of Mrs. Carbery on one side, the creaking of Blackbury's bed on the other. The hatred of familiar things that comes upon one struck by sudden sorrow lay heavy upon her. . . .

And least, last of all did she guess at the wild longing for that safe, quiet room, that was to beset her, in the night that lay in real truth before her.

She gained the yard unseen, and found her dress. Her bathing cloak was with it; she swung it over her arm and took her red bathing cap. Afterwards she was to remember these things; she was to have cause.

Again a blank, filled with wild efforts to keep back the terrible tears that threatened to lay her low as a thunder-shower lays low the herbage and the flowers. She did not know how she had reached the swimming pool, but here it was, and here was she with half her clothes off, and strewn about the rocks that bordered the pool. Why was she doing this? Why not? There were to be no whys in her life hereafter. She was to drift, drift always, down the lonely ways of time. What had she been composing that afternoon? She could not tell. It was wiped out of her mind; gone, as if it had never existed. Was she going mad? She almost hoped so.

She had got into her bathing dress without knowing; her fingers were fastening the shoulder buttons. Should she dive in? Swim? Stay on the edge? She could not tell what she was going to do. The springs that worked her life seemed broken. She found herself, presently, sitting on the rocks, back to the tide-way entrance, face to the flowers and the land, crying—crying terribly at last.

.

There was a canoe outside the swimming bath.

Sunset had seen for some days past the same canoe, hovering in the same place. It had been there on the previous evening when Conn and his whale-boat made their call. Conn had noticed it, without particular interest—except in so far as he had ob-

served that the native paddler was fishing in water shallower than that generally chosen by the New Cumberland folk. Reef fish are not, by a long way, so good to eat as the firmer deep-sea fish that live outside lagoons.

He might have noticed—had he not been taken up with other things—that the canoe was quite unusually big for a single paddler, and that it had a heap of nets in the bottom; an odd outfit—if one thought of it—for a native who was apparently fishing with hook and line. But no one about Meliasi took any particular notice of natives unless they made themselves troublesome. Conn, certainly, had other things to think of.

The canoe was there, when he made his wild dash away from Residency island, this second evening, half blind with misery and rage. He almost ran it down, steering the whaleboat for the reef-passage. He saw nothing but the open sea, felt nothing but his own mad desire to get away from the place and all it held. The paddler had to work his hardest to clear Conn's track in time. He stopped, when the big boat was safely out of the way, and, staring after it, made a remark in broken English to the effect that the Little King seemed angry, and it must be his woman he was angry with, since he had been in the boathouse with her for half an hour.

"Angry?" chuckled the voice of a person invisible. "He wild, that fellow Conn? He been row along him missus? Very good. Me too much like."

"Altogether he wild," affirmed the native, paddling slowly, with his eye on the belt of mangroves that concealed the swimming bath. "Me think him been close-up fight along him missus."

A whale-spout of delighted swearing from the pile of fishing nets, in reply. The native, who had been long enough with whites to understand most of it, burst out laughing.

"'Fore God, massa," he declared, "you savvy too much dam."

"Hold your row," said the voice, suddenly careful. "We come up close."

"This fellow Mary him no coming. By-'n'-by him come."

"You takem line," ordered the voice. "You make all same catchem fish. Close up you go, longside mangrove, you wait. By-'n'-by this missus you hearem come, you go inside mangrove, look-see."

The native nodded. They were nearing the mangrove trunks; the great trees, eighty and a hundred feet high, stood in densely shaded water, surrounded by their million growing children. In and out the paddler worked the canoe, avoiding with care the spear-like prominences of iron hard young shoots, and the blind alleys among the knitted black stems that led only into difficulties. Progress was slow; the invisible somebody, hidden underneath the nets, kicked restlessly about, and yawned once or twice.

"Five nights, five nights," came a humming murmur. "Oh, blanky blank, five nights. Oh, John Stanley Winton Fursey, five blanky blank nights here, and two on the dancing ground, and no girl. Oh, Johnny John, go home and boil your head, for you're no good." Then the tone changed; the murmur—low and cautious always—addressed itself to the native paddler. "Hold on, you black devil; easy as she goes. I hearem this fellow Mary she come."

The paddler became a statue of bronze.

"Masser," he whispered, without moving his head. "All right dis time. One Mary coming. No two."

"Hold on," came the warning whisper. They waited. In a minute or two, responding to Fursey's touch on his foot, the native glided forward. It was possible to see between the mangrove stems now, if one advanced noiselessly.

"What you see?"

"Masser, me see one fellow Mary, him sit down, too much cry."

"Calico (clothes) him takem off?"

"Calico belong swim, him havem, masser. Black calico. Him no swim. Him sit down, him cry."

"Good. Hold on. Suppose I no find you here when I come back, then I cut off your two ears, make you eat them."

"I stop, 'fore God I stop, masser."

"Mind you do." Fursey had risen up from under the mass of fishing nets; he slung himself, noiselessly, over the edge of the canoe. Barefooted, he crept along the wall of piled coral that edged the inlet to the bath; the blocks were large, and he found footing easily, protected by the height of the wall. At the entrance he paused, peeping cautiously between the piles that guarded the bath from roaming sharks and swordfish.

"A cinch," he murmured delightedly, looking at Deirdre's unconscious figure. Fursey was a keen reader of Wild West literature, and deliberately adopted both its dress and its language at times. There was a strong strain of the "movie" actor in the queer little scoundrel. For the job of this

evening, he had got himself up in red shirt, rough breeches of dungaree, a belt stocked with knives and pistols, and a Buffalo Bill hat. He quite saw himself on a magazine cover as "Bad Bill of Nevada" or "The Terror of Red Gulch." Strangers had been known to set down this vain little chunk of flesh as a mere incarnate joke; a negligible piece of stuff and swagger. . . .

There was a red handkerchief tied about his neck, cowboy fashion. He loosened it as he crept forward, and held it between his teeth, swinging free. Deirdre's black figure was only a yard from him now. He had made no noise, but she was crying so bitterly, shoulders heaving, face hidden between her hands, that she would not, in all likelihood, have heard him even had he tramped across the coral rock, or shouted.

The sun, sinking down beyond the lagoon, shot up a last jet of light among the trees, and disappeared. Fursey, handkerchief now shifted to one hand, deliberately waited. Time enough for a few minutes more; best to let the light sink a little. It would be dark in a jiffy. . . .

Deirdre cried on. Her world had sunk away under her feet; Steve—Steve!—had spoken to her cruelly, looked at her like an enemy, left her. What was she going to do? What was she to live for? She did not care what became of her now. . . .

Many a girl has said as much to herself. Few have the statement challenged as promptly as befell to Deirdre. For just at the moment when the words were forming themselves in her mind, the falling dusk leaped suddenly to dark; something was thrust into her mouth, stifling her instant frightened cry;

an arm like a belt of steel caught her about the body. She felt herself swung off her feet, and carried. She tried to fight, to scream—it seemed that, after all, what happened to her did matter, enormously—but the handkerchief half choked her, and the powerful arm held her as a python holds a rabbit. There was a period of swinging about and scrambling, during which she did not cease to fight, fiercely, uselessly—then she felt herself lowered into something that smelt damp and felt woody and hard. Her hands were swiftly tied; the handkerchief was readjusted, so that she could breathe with a fair amount of freedom, but could neither see nor speak. A pile of something soft was laid on top of her. She felt the motion of a canoe; heard the low, cautious beat of its paddle; was conscious of a freshening current of air, penetrating the nets that lay over her.

Fursey, sitting upright in the canoe, and keeping a sharp look-out, chuckled to himself, as he sped with his capture on towards Wawaka Island.

CHAPTER XIII

IN the pearlers' hall, on the top of Wawaka Island, there was never silence.

During the day, when the sloops were out on the lagoon, the cook boys made the place their own chattering as only natives and monkeys can chatter, breaking firewood, eating, shouting, fighting. They kept a sentry posted on the top of the island to give warning of the fleet's return; when that was signalled, they drove away their women; ran for coconut brooms, swept out the worst of the day's accumulated rubbish, and set the pots a-boiling, all in the midst of chattering and clamour, that ceased like a sound shut off by a door, the moment their masters arrived. Then, the pearlers themselves, with loud talking, cursing, calls to one boy and another, took up the tale of noise. By lantern light and firelight, later on, there would be card-playing and dicing, and shouts of those who lost and won. The day's catch of pearls would change hands; someone would accuse someone else of cheating; knives would be drawn, perhaps used. . . .

Men asleep on their scattered beds, fires down to white dust of ashes, black darkness in the roof, moonlight pouring through the doorways—there was, even yet, no stillness. Always, in this huge rough house, the wind was playing tricks somewhere or other—flapping a loose section of thatch, among

the hundreds that made up the roof; beating a branch of eucalyptus or oleander against the wattle walls; screaming through some gap, with a wail like dogs baying at the moon; thundering, on nights when the wild north-west was up, from one end of the place to another, and driving before it torn leaves of the cocoanut palms, and bits of broken coral from the path outside, over the sleepers' beds. Certainly, Wawaka was not peaceful.

. . . Through the noises of the night, with the huge black roof above her, and the marigold-coloured light of the swung lantern making strange patterns on the walls, Deirdre watched. She did not sleep. She did not feel as if she ever would sleep again, this side of the grave.

She was penned in a tiny enclosure of cocoanut leaf screens, that stood in one corner of the hall. She was not fettered in any way, but Kalaka, Furse's girl, was sleeping beside her, one sturdy bronze-coloured arm thrown round her waist. Kalaka was snoring hard; nevertheless, the least movement on Deirdre's part caused the snores to cease, and if the movement were repeated, Kalaka would wake, and tell the white woman, angrily, to keep quiet. . . .

How long was it since she had been carried, wrapped in a bundle of fishing nets, from Furse's canoe to the pearlers' hall?—where the men were coming in from the day's work, strolling, cooking, drinking, lying about—where Furse, with a yell, had set her on her unsteady feet, pulled off the nets, and shouted to the men to look what a fine fish he had caught!

It seemed a week. It was possibly five hours—eight o'clock when they landed her, no doubt, and

now it was after one in the morning, by the sinking of the moon.

She had made a strange and a very lovely picture, had she but known it, standing there, all white and black in her black Canadian swimming dress, cloudy-dark hair down about her shoulders, dark, desperate eyes staring out of a small, marble face. Fursey kept firm hold of her arm, as if he thought she might take wing, and seemed to hold her forth and show her to the crowd, as he would have shown a newly-purchased dog or horse.

"Some girl, believe me," he had said, in the Wild West idiom he affected. "Conn's girl, this is. Conn's girl, whom he told where he's got his mine, and what's in it. They're dragging the swimming bath for her corpse at this very minute." He let out a crash of laughter. He kept tight hold of her arm; she wondered if he knew how much his grip was hurting her. She saw the pearlers' faces as a mist full of eyes; she felt dazed and giddy, and would have fallen but for Fursey's hold. The men were staring, shouting; she saw beards wag, and teeth behind wide grins, now; they were talking—about her. . . .

"Who says so?" yelled Fursey suddenly. "Who says it's too damned mean? Show him to me!"

She had not seen his hand move, but there it was, stretched out—the right hand; he was holding her with the left—and in it there was an automatic pistol, that had come from—where?

The men knew; they knew that Fursey, partly through natural ability, and partly by dint of endless practice, could draw and aim the Colt he always carried about as quickly as a cat can strike at the eyes of a dog. Nobody answered his furious

question. Deirdre felt a little contemptuous of it; she thought, so far as she could think at such a moment, that he was simply "showing off." . . . And why was he aiming? There was nothing, by his own words, to aim at.

Then she saw the reflection of her own white fear in another face—the face of a youngish man, at the far end of the hall—and realized, instantly, that Fursey's question had been purely rhetorical, for he was aiming, with a deadly certainty, at the head of the youngish man.

In a moment, the whole hall fell to silence. The wind blattered at the doorway; there was a sound of clinking coral, as a native's bare foot moved stealthily outside.

"It was you, I believe, who said the capture of this young lady was too damned mean?" asked Fursey, with a giggling politeness. The youngish man turned his head from side to side, looking for escape. The others swung loose of him, right and left, and bunched together, staring. . . .

Deirdre flung her hands to her ears; the pistol had gone off almost in her face. Through the muffling palms, she heard a shriek, almost a howl. The youngish man was running about, doubled up, his hand upon the side of his head. He dropped it, and she saw, in the lamp light, dark blood on his neck and shirt. Where his ear had been there was nothing but a lobe and a hole.

Fursey giggled again.

"Any *complaints*?" he shouted, in the tone of an orderly officer going rounds.

No one answered. The wounded man sat down on the ground rocking himself backward and forward, his hand to the place where his ear had been.

A brown woman, by and by, a small terrified thing wearing almost no clothes, slipped out from somewhere, and coaxed him away. . . .

Fursey looked round the dusk, lamp-lit hall again.

"Now, if nobody has anything more to say," he remarked, "I'll go on where I was interrupted. This young lady is to pay us a little visit. I'm sure we shall all be very polite to her, unless she gives us cause to be otherwise, and she'd hardly be so foolish as to do that—hey, my dear?"

He seemed to expect the girl to answer him, but she could find no words. "This isn't true," she was telling herself. "This is a bad dream; I must have got an attack of fever. I'll wake up in a minute, and hear the frog on the wash-basin—and Mrs. Carbery snoring. It's a dream. Oh God, help me to wake up—I don't like it; I can't bear any more of it."

The night was hot, but she began to shiver as she stood. This dream—if it was a dream—if it was a dream!—made all her limbs feel weak, and took her voice away. Perhaps she was dying in her sleep. She had heard of such things. . . . More and more she shook.

"Kalaka!" roared Fursey, in the immense voice that went so ill with his small stature. "Kalaka! Bring some of your clothes. This lady is cold."

The girl Kalaka came out. She was fat, sullen, scared looking; a handsome creature, with savage black eyes, and a mop of silky curls that told of some Malay cross in her ancestry, the New Cumberland heads being woolly. She was gorgeously dressed for a native, with petticoat of crimson silk, and short bedgown of yellow; there were gold rings on her arms, and a band of gold across her hair.

She stared at Deirdre, essence of concentrated hate in her sparkling eyes. Fursey told her again to get some clothes. Slowly she obeyed, returning with a long loose gown of green print, which she flung over the white girl's head.

Deirdre had scarce been conscious of her lightly clad condition, but she was relieved to feel herself completely covered again; the eyes of these men were like burning glasses fixed upon her, as she stood under the lamp in her bathing dress, hands still fastened with Fursey's handkerchief. This last the owner removed, throwing it behind him.

"Give her some supper," he said to Kalaka. "She sleep along you, you hold her fast. Suppose you let her go, me I take you on top Wawaka, throw you over, all same I did Maiva." He thrust his face almost into Kalaka's and glared at her. The girl winced away from him.

"You come," she said, nipping the white girl's arm tightly into hers. She cast another of her looks of hate at Deirdre, as she led her to a kitchen shed outside. There was cold rice on a plate; she offered it to Deirdre, but the latter shook her head. "Water, please," she begged. Kalaka brought it in a tin, and watched her as she drank.

"If you let me go," said Deirdre, putting down the tin, and re-assembling all the courage she could find, "if you let me go, I will give you so much money you will never want any again." She glanced out at the darkened world beyond the cook-shed. Surely it might be possible—since Fursey had been so foolish as to leave her in charge of a mere woman like herself—to make her escape! This was no dream. This was a horrible reality, on which she

scarcely dared to allow her mind to dwell. She fixed it on one point—to get away.

But Kalaka shook her curling head as if she would shake it off.

“Why for I die for you? I no such fool,” she said, following up her words with a rattle of Furse’s own particular language that made Deirdre’s blood run cold—so horrible it sounded in the mouth of a young girl.

“He’d never dare to—”

“He do anyt’ing. You hearem me. Anyt’ing. Dat Maiva—”

“What of her?”

“She here—before me. He steal her from one village in mountain, same he steal me. He tell Maiva—‘Suppose you go along another man, by-an’-by I frow you.’ . . . You come; I show.”

With savage impetuosity, she seized Deirdre’s hand, and rushed her out of the cookhouse, a very little way, to where the ground beneath their feet suddenly broke off into a void of winking stars. A strong salt breeze from the sea came whirling up, billowing Kalaka’s royal robes, and Deirdre’s cotton dress.

“Look down,” came Kalaka’s voice. Deirdre did not dare; she heard the waves bursting on the coral a long, long way below, and she could sense, rather than see, that the edge was very near.

“Take me away,” she begged, shivering.

“Dey take Maiva,” went on the girl in a hushed voice, “dey take her long her dress—so—”

She caught at Deirdre’s skirts, and made as if she would swing her by them. Deirdre hurriedly shrank back.

“Dey make her go—one—two—tree—an’ ha-

way!" Kalaka flung out her hands, and gazed down, as if indeed she saw the body of the doomed girl, turning and whirling in the empty air.

"You been hearem one orange fall down from big, *beeg* orange tree? Dis all same. Maiva she fall, she come down—Waksh!" With ghastly verisimilitude. "Maiva she spill, all same orange. You think Kalaka dam fool? You want she go 'Waksh, too?' "

"What did they do it for?" asked Deirdre, in a low voice of horror.

"She make gammon along another man," explained Kalaka carelessly. "No good make gammon Fursey. You come back."

"Look here, girl," cried Deirdre, in despair, "do you want me to stay? Aren't you afraid your Fursey will like me better than you?"

She hated herself for the suggestion, but she could not miss any chance. Besides, she thought she had read a story somewhere. . . .

Kalaka laughed. "I no 'fraid," she explained, "'cause I stick you all-a-same figg, (pig) suppose Fursey like you. Come back." She jerked the captive along to the hall again. And Deirdre, tasting the bitterness of despair, submitted. At all events, if the worst came to the worst, there was that rock. It might be she would welcome it, in the end.

Fursey, who seemed to have made definite plans and to be acting on them, ordered Kalaka at once to take Deirdre into her own little screened-off sleeping corner, and to keep her there till the morning. He joined the pearlers after, and they threw dice, one by one, for the larger pearls of the day's catch. They made a great deal of noise over it,

and quarrelled not a little, but there was no more bloodshed—towards which desirable end, the absence of spirits no doubt contributed. Fursey, in pursuance of the plan he communicated to no one, had barred them for the evening. Beer was drunk by cases; before long, half the men had fallen into a muddled sleep where they sat, and the rest were drowsy. Fursey, himself, put out all the lights but one—that which hung, like a beacon, at the entrance to the screened corner where Deirdre and Kalaka lay.

Towards dawn, the wind fell, and the grateful silence, helped by the chill that goes before breaking day, soothed Deirdre into sleep. Worn out, she slept heavily, and did not wake till after eight o'clock. The clamour of a fierce dispute among the pearling men aroused her. They had breakfasted, and were gathered together near the doorway, arguing some point with their ugly little chief. Until the matter was settled, it seemed, none of them would go out with the boats.

Deirdre had awaked too late to hear the cause of the dispute; she only caught the answer that Fursey was making.

“ . . . What would you have, boys? Where could the little tart be safer than she is up here, with Kalaka looking after her, and Child and me seeing she doesn't get away till she's told us what we want to know?”

He was milder now than when the wretched lad with the shot-off ear had opposed him, the night before. No one like Fursey to feel the mouths of his wild team; to know when reins should be held tight, and when they must, for a moment, be loosened. There was fretting on the bit this morning;

he felt it, and gave to the pull. But his lip, below the cat-like moustache, was nipped hard in, and one thought kept making furious circles in his mind, again and again. "Wait. You wait. I know who this is. Oh, wait till I get you!"

Still, he spoke them fair.

"No one's got any reason for harming her. We'll tell her—are you listening, Deirdre?"

Kalaka nudged her to reply. "Yes," she called feebly, from behind her screen.

"Then listen to this—and you, boys, listen, too. We want to know where Conn's mine is, and we know she knows. She's only got to tell us, and she can go home that minute. What's in that to make a fuss about?"

"What are you going to"—"Tell us—" broke from half a dozen men together. Fursey held up his hand for silence.

"Child can tell me," he said. His face was as sweet as cream, all but the bitten lip that nobody could see.

"They want to know," spoke Child, leaning with his immense slack bulk against one of the tree-trunk pillars of the house—"they want to know how you propose to act, if she doesn't tell."

"Oh, you needn't worry. I don't want to get the blanky man-of-war after us. If she won't tell for politeness, she'll tell for love."

"What do you mean by that?"

For answer, Fursey beckoned to the man named Smith.

"You can talk," he said.

"What do you want me to say?" grumbled the creature. He was one of the worst wrecks of that assembly of human wreckage, a stooping, red-nosed

thing, with a painful air of past gentility about him. He stared at Fursey with watery, ineffective dislike.

"When your name wasn't Smith," said Fursey, "what was it?"

"Tritton," grunted the man. Some of the pearl-ers shifted about, and exclaimed.

"That's the chap," said Fursey. "You were a missionary here when you first came up, weren't you?"

"What if I was?"

"We won't say what they chucked you out for, or where you'd be if this was a Crown Colony, with police. You can just tell us, were you licensed to perform marriages, or were you not?"

"Yes."

"And you still are. Well, boys, do you see it? If the young lady won't tell her dear friends what she knows, she'll tell her dear husband, me, won't she? And if any of the people (he mentioned what he thought of the people) at Residency island cut up their capers, why, nobody, not even a blanky man-of-war, can get down on a man for running off with his own wife, can they? See?"

They did see, apparently. Their awe of the little scoundrel who ruled Wawaka Island, momentarily suspended, returned. The access of unwonted scruple, awakened by captive Deirdre's helplessness and beauty, fell away. If the "little tart" was to be let go, safe and unharmed, immediately she had told, it was all right. If she was to be kept on the island as Fursey's wife, it was all right again. He could find ways and means of making her tell. And the ceremony would keep the law—so far as any existed—at bay.

One thing no one yet had asked; whether Deirdre would consent, or not, to marry the red-haired little villain who stood before them. Child put the question; it cannot be supposed he did not know the answer, but he may have wished that someone else should know it too.

"Does a girl always marry a man for the asking?"

"A girl," said Fursey, twirling his cat moustaches, "a girl may be very glad to have the chance." He spoke loud; if Deirdre, in her palm-leaf shelter, did not hear him, it was not his fault.

She did hear. She crouched suddenly close to Kalaka, as if the native woman could, or would, have helped her. Kalaka drew away, and stared at her with burning eyes. She said nothing, but Deirdre knew the savage heart was torn with murderous jealousy, and that nothing save the fear of the rock that had been Maiva's doom protected her from Kalaka.

When the men were gone, and only Child and Fursey remained in the big hall, Fursey, giggling, came round the corner of Deirdre's little shelter. He looked at her as she sat, half crouching, on the ground, and twirled his red moustache more than ever.

"Hn-hn!" he cackled. And again, "Hn-hn!"

"Got anything to tell me?" he asked presently. Deirdre did not speak. She was thinking, rapidly, desperately. It seemed to her, so far as she could judge in that tense moment, that her wisest course lay in saying nothing—in putting Fursey off as long as possible. Fursey, for once, had blundered in estimating the power of the brain that lived and worked behind that pretty face of hers. He had supposed, as most men would, that big eyes and lit-

tle mouth, wavy hair, soft cheeks petal-touched with pink, spelt silliness, at the least, frivolity.

But Deirdre's keen mind had pierced to the heart of his design; she had touched, unerringly, the flaw in the case as Fursey put it to her. He promised, did he, to let her go free, unharmed, if she told him where Conn's mysterious treasure was to be found? All very well had she believed him. She did not. She felt certain that the capture at the baths had been arranged in such a manner as to make everyone on the island reasonably certain that she had met her death by going out beyond the protecting fence. She guessed—and guessed rightly—that Fursey had dropped something of hers in deep water outside the baths,—her cap—her bathing cloak. . . . They would think she was dead. They would not be quite certain; they would look for her on the chance—but they would be easily satisfied; would soon conclude that she really had been drowned, since everything pointed that way.

Then—what had Fursey to gain by letting her go? Nothing. He had, on the contrary, everything to lose.

She saw it all. Either he would put an end to her—she believed him capable of it—and let her vanish from earth's surface, when he had gained the knowledge he desired, or he would marry her by means of the renegade missionary's services (that it would be illegal, he could not know) and think to defy her friends, keeping her as his wife. He would calculate, that once in his power, she would not care to face the world again; that she would be glad of the bare chance of making herself legally "honest," and that, with time on his side, he could find means of forcing her to tell the truth.

If she told, now, it would probably mean death, and would save her from nothing.

If she refused flatly to tell, Fursey would marry her, practically by force, and have it out of her at his leisure.

If she temporized, somehow, he would not ill use her; he would not kill her, or oblige her to marry him. He would wait—a little—and see what way the cat was going to jump.

All this flashed through her mind as she sat on the ground looking up, with heavy frightened eyes, from under her loosened hair, and answering not at all to Fursey's questions.

"Well?" demanded Fursey, with the inevitable giggle.

"Not yet," was what she managed to bring out, through lips curiously unsteady.

"What, not yet?" giggled Fursey. "You'd better, you know. Much better. Things might happen to you that happened to me—down in Meliasi street. That's a score to be settled with your fancy man, and you might do the settling."

Deirdre caught his meaning, and turned sick, but she managed to speak more clearly.

"I meant—I meant that it wouldn't be safe. If anyone went now to look for the—mine—it would be understood what had happened. And they'd know I had told. I don't want them to know."

Fursey looked at her under red, bunched eyebrows.

"Ah!" he said. "And why not, Deirdre?"

She was collecting all her forces now. This man must be deceived—must be.

"They would think it was revenge."

"Oh—ho—revenge! Now what for, Deirdre?" The way of his speaking her name made her hate it.

In answering, her voice had the ring of truth, and she knew it.

"Mr. Conn and I were engaged, and he has thrown me over." Let Fursey think what he chose. He would naturally think she wished to be revenged; that she would tell willingly—by and by. He, or his like, could never know that she would have defended any secret of Conn's to the last drop of her heart's blood—to the end of the high rock, and the fall, if need be.

The chief of Wawaka grew grave, which showed that he was pleased.

"Ah! My boat boy told me of a quarrel. . . . So he threw you over, Deirdre? More fool he. What little games of yours has he been finding out? Never mind; they won't worry me. Off with the old love and on with the new." He cast her a languishing glance, which Deirdre forced herself to return. "The creature's vanity must help me," she thought.

"Yes," she said. "That was what I was crying about. You needn't have carried me off. I would have gone—to pay him out. He's so very conceited; he thinks there's no one like himself. Great clumsy fellow." She sent another glance at Fursey. She saw he was half deceived, but only half, so far.

"Wait—just a couple of days," she went on hurriedly. "As soon as ever it's safe, I'll show you. I couldn't tell you. Why, you don't think he could have kept a place safe all these years, if it was the sort of thing anyone could find by just mentioning it?"

"You can tell me what it is, anyhow," observed Fursey. He was watching her very narrowly. She did not know where she found the strength to laugh back at him.

"Gold," she said promptly. "Nuggets—chunks. In the coral rock. In the caves at—at—I don't know the name of the place, but it's some miles off; I could find it if I were on the shore. I made him show me. He gave me some of the gold." She was astonished at her own fluent lying.

"It don't sound too likely," mused Fursey. "Gold—in coral. In—"

Child, for the first time, broke in.

"Not unknown," he said, leaning over the partition. "The goldfields of Woodlark, in Papua, are that kind. They get it where it sank into the coral rock. Quite a lot." Deirdre, unseen, threw him a swift glance of gratitude; guessed, in that moment—how, she did not know—that Child was on her side, and that he did not believe her story of the gold, even though he was backing her up.

"I—I'll take you to it as soon as things blow over," she said, fighting hard for her chance. "He's terribly revengeful. I—I don't know what he'd do if he thought I had given him away. Let me wait—let me have a day or two."

Fursey, musing uglily, with one hairy hand at his lip, eyed her in silence.

"You shall have it," was his final conclusion. Then he bent down, and took his shoes off. They were handsome shoes, of fine brown leather, with heels too high for a man. Fursey was inordinately proud of his little feet.

"Put them on," he said. "They won't be too

large. You, Kalaka, get me another pair. Get a hat for the white woman."

Kalaka, sullenly, did his bidding. Fursey tossed the hat to Deirdre. "Put it on," he said.

"Where—what—" she began to ask.

"You and I and Child," said Fursey, "are going for a little walk in the bush."

CHAPTER XIV

“**S**IT her down,” said Fursey’s voice. “She can walk now.”

The carriers stopped with a jerk. They had been labouring hard for the last half hour. In the stillness made by their ready halt, one could hear their panting breath.

“Undo the hammock and take the handkerchief out of her mouth,” ordered Fursey. “She can screech all she wants to here.”

Somebody fumbled at the lashings of the long bundle. Air and daylight came in. Deirdre’s cramped limbs, unable to carry her at first, let her down; she sat on the ground, dazed. A white man’s hand slipped the handkerchief gag from her mouth. She looked up and saw Child’s immense, awkward form standing above her, and little Fursey grinning beside.

Four pig’s feet were lying on the ground. She stared at them, wondering, as well as she could for the giddiness and sickness caused by that long journey underneath the sun, what they might be for. No one took the trouble to explain. It was not till afterwards that she knew she had been bundled up to represent a pig carried native fashion, wrapped in leaves and slung to a pole, and that the feet gave the last, convincing touch. Nor did she know that Fursey and Child had followed another

road, joining her only now, when the sun was already westering and the carriers, hard driven by fear of their ruthless little chief, had taken her many miles into the interior of the great, unknown island.

They were under shade now, upon a narrow winding track that began to loop stiffly uphill. There were banyan trunks by the wayside, waving dank hair of aerial rootlets over the road—if road it could be called that was no more than a foot in width.

Pitcher-plants, swaying outwards, shed foul odours from their fair-appearing cornucopias of shining green. A flower, the colour of raw flesh, hung in clusters on a thorny stem; its buds were huge, angular and heavy, like gobbets of butchers' meat. The knees and ankles of the banyan trunks, where they had been lately cut to clear the path, showed red and bleeding. There are spots in the fierce Western Pacific—known to those who know the islands, and to those only—where Nature, taken by some mood of demoniac sport, seems to have mimicked in herself the devilish human creatures who live on her sufferance. This was such a place—had Deirdre been in a mood to see it.

But she was in no mood to see or think of anything save her present plight, which she judged to be worse than that of yesterday. Yesterday, she had been within a mile or two of her friends, though without power of communication. It had been, at least, possible that they might take the chance of her being still alive, might search the island, and find her there. Steve—surely Steve would not accept her death without a struggle—he—who had warned her—oh, how justly!—never to leave the

Residency island unguarded. It mattered little or nothing, at this crisis, that they had quarrelled and parted; that they were not likely, now, ever to be married. Deirdre knew well that the very heat and fury of his anger showed the strength of his love for her. Steve would not tamely believe that she was dead, even though there seemed to be no reason for believing otherwise. She could imagine him going over to Wawaka at the full speed of his best oarsmen, challenging Fursey, hunting the island from landing-place to summit, from coral shore to shore. . . .

Ah, but so, no doubt, could Fursey imagine—that was why he had taken her off into the bush. That was why he had had her carried on a pole like a pig, covered up in leaves, so that there should be no tale to tell of a white woman borne away into the forests—that was his reason for keeping hid, though doubtless near, until they had reached this lonely spot at the end of the foothills, and the beginning of the inland ranges. Here was the boundary between the tribes of the coast and the tribes of the hills always at war, after a secret sniping fashion—never on speaking terms. . . . The plan had been well laid. Sitting there on the ground, she saw the mortal danger in which, now, she was entangled. The sickness of fear crept over her; the lonely track, leading to unknown forest depths, to horrors whispered of among the whites, half known, seemed like the very track of hell. . . .

“Hop it,” said Fursey’s voice, muffled by a huge cigar. “The boys have had enough; you’ll have to walk the hill.” He laid his hand on her arm, as if to pull her up. Deirdre shook her benumbed limbs into action, and hurriedly rose. She stood,

swaying a little, and staring about her. The sun was getting low; it came through the leaves a little in spurts of angry fire. The heat was frightful; Deirdre, the carriers, Child and Fursey, dripped from bare arms and foreheads; hair was like seaweed new drawn from the sea. They started. Child stalked ahead, and looked at no one; now and then he spat blood-coloured saliva on the path, and Deirdre knew, with a sinking of heart, that he had drugged himself with betelnut. She followed next; behind her walked Kalaka, who had mysteriously appeared from nowhere; Fursey and the carriers came after.

"Where are we going? What are they going to do?" was the thought that hammered in her brain, mingled with a wild, unceasing call for Conn. Could he not hear? Was he, who loved her so, unconscious of her need, while she called and called? . . . She tried hard to send her message. "Steve," she repeated in her mind, as they toiled up the rough, ascending track. "Steve! Save me. Come!"

It was a cruel journey. Deirdre was young and strong, but she was tired, she had not eaten that day, save for a crust that Kalaka, at Fursey's bidding, had tossed her, and the jerking and jolting of the rude litter had left her stiff in almost every muscle. The track wound up and up, with never a pause for breath. When she would have stopped, Fursey snarled at her. "We'll never get there before night if you don't hurry up," he told her, with a blast of his characteristic swearing. "And if we don't, the coast tribes will get us and kai-kai us. Get on!"

Child seemed half stupefied with betelnut; his

eyes were wide and glaring, his mouth all over crimson stain—but he reached a huge hand to Deirdre by and by, and whirled her along up the path at his side. And so they went for another two hours, until the sun failed altogether, and dusk began to rise like a green, drowning tide. They could still see the road, thin as a furrow, cutting the dense bush, and the strip of shadowy sky above. All else was forest, night and fear.

Suddenly, Kalaka, who had been padding silently for hours, called out to Child in native. Child nodded, and turned to the right off the track into the bush. Directed by the girl, he wound about between the stems of nutmeg and wild fig, until, more by feeling than sight, he struck another path.

“Dass right now,” said Kalaka. “’Nother road, he make for to gammon someone. Suppose no savvy, walk along him, you fall down one big, bee-eg hole full up along spear. Spear he go along inside you belly, den you die.”

“Fine defences they have,” said Fursesey cheerfully.

Kalaka halted the party a little farther on, and called out at the top of her shrill voice what seemed to be a password. It was answered from not very far away.

“Go on,” said the girl. “Diss place, s’pose you no ’top, sing out, by-’n’-by man belong village s’oot him gun along load (road), him kill you dead.” She seemed to swell with pride as she spoke. Deirdre guessed that this village, to which they were coming, must be the one from which the girl had been bought, to be a slave to Fursesey on Wawaka Island. Kalaka was evidently enjoying her office of guide.

Singing as she went, she led them through the

thickening dusk, to a point where something like a wall rose up and barred the path. Two shadowy shapes, armed with guns, spears, and clinking cart-ridge belts, jumped out from nowhere, and laid their musket barrels across the way. Kalaka spoke to them; so, to their astonishment, did Child, who seemed to know the language as well as the girl herself. The men, who had been hovering doubtfully from foot to foot, uncertain whether to let the strangers pass, let out a united shout. One of them seized the white man by his arm, and made, in the dusk, a curious motion, which Deirdre could just see—pulling his own hand, with a jerk, across his mouth. Child did the same. With a yell of delighted laughter, the native let him go, and led the way into the fortified town. It was a wolf-mouth of a gate, just wide enough for one slim person to squeeze through, and further protected by its extreme lowness, which obliged anyone entering the village to bend down almost double. In turn, Child, Kalaka, Deirdre, and Fursey entered. The natives who had carried her—two only—stood trembling at the gate, not daring to go through. Roughly, the guardians spoke to Fursey and Kalaka, pointing to the native strangers, and shaking their woolly heads. Fursey said something in a low tone to the nearest; Kalaka, clapping her hands together, with an ugly laugh, ran into the village square which was brightly lit by torches and cooking fires.

“You come,” she said to her charge, dragging the white woman by the hand. “You get out of the damn road, will you.” (Quoting English of Wawaka Island.)

“What is the matter?” asked Deirdre.

“Woman get out of de way,” was all Kalaka

would say. A remembrance of something heard or read about the customs of these fierce and cruel people troubled the girl; she could not be sure, but she thought that the sudden retirement of women meant fighting—murder. What were they going to do?

Kalaka, hiding behind a house, and still holding fast to Deirdre's hand, seemed to listen. There was no cry, no struggle. There was, after one interminable minute, a crackling blow. Another. Then nothing more.

"He pinish," said Kalaka delightedly. She let go Deirdre's hand, and began to dance, throwing her arms above her head, and singing a wild, but musical song. There were other women in the enclosed square of the fortified village; like Kalaka they danced and sang, flinging up their arms, and tossing back their heads. Deirdre did not dare to ask what it was that had just happened. She hardly dared to let herself think. The carriers . . . who alone could tell where she had been taken . . . who would have talked, as natives always did . . . to their friends. . . . She knew that if she thought about it, she must lose her nerve. And never, in all her eight and twenty years, had nerve been more sorely needed. "I won't think," she told herself, biting her trembling lips. "What's this village? A mountain village in the unexplored part of the island, I suppose. What an immense, dusty square—and all the little dirty palm houses built round it. . . . Those are drums—those enormous things in the middle, hollow trees, with horrible faces carved. . . . My God, I'm tired—tired. There is Fursey coming back."

He came, strutting in his high-heeled shoes, and

twisting the incredibly long ends of his ginger moustache. The firelight and torchlight shone upon him, and showed clearly every line in his wide, villainous, but clever little face. He was giggling. Something—Deirdre feared to think what—had given him satisfaction.

“Come along, you Child,” he called. Child, slower, soberer, came shambling after him. Half a dozen native bucks, with woolly hair lined into black and white stripes, black paint round their fierce eyes, red and white paint in patterns upon their naked, glistening bodies, followed Child. They stared at Deirdre with a kind of horror; she was as strange, unnatural to them as a ghost might have been to herself. No white woman had ever been seen or dreamed of, so far inland, on unknown Meliasi.

“Well—hn-hn!” laughed Fursey. “Child and I have got to be going; we mean to be back on Wawaka before morning, in case anyone gets talking, and comes over to pay a call. This is Kalaka’s town. She’ll stay here till I give her leave to go again. She’s been well paid for; they won’t let her away—or you. I’m going to show up at home; I’ll be back in a few days’ time, and by then you’ll have made up your mind to take me to that mine of Conn’s. Look here, my lady,” he thrust his face close to hers; Kalaka grinned to see her wince back, “I don’t know how much I believe or don’t believe of that little yarn of yours. But you can believe this. If you don’t tell, you’ll be made to and my ways of making people do things aren’t nice. If you do tell, you can take me to see the place first—when the talk has died out; they’ll all think you drowned, you know—and then you can

either go back to your friends"— she saw his eyes blink as he said it, and knew that he was lying—"or you can stay on Wawaka, and be the queen of the island, with me. You can have four days to make up your mind; I shan't want you before that. And you can be easy that nobody'll find you here. No one knows this place exists, except Kalaka and us; the hill tribes eat the coast tribes on sight, so there's no gossiping goes on, and the whites have never been here. I don't want to be unkind to you," he continued after a pause. "I'm not a devil, you know. I'm just a man who does what he feels like doing, and doesn't let anybody or anything come between. You treat me well and I'll treat you well. That's me, Fursey, and everybody knows it. . . . Kalaka, you look out good along this fellow Mary. Suppose you let him go, you go where Maiva went. Three-four day I come back." The chief of the village, a man with a face like an iron devil, and legs and arms like the trunks of trees, had just come up, and was looking at the party with the calm incuriousness of true high breeding. "Talk to this haw-haw johnnie, will you?" Fursey demanded of Child. "Tell him it's a hundred-weight of tobacco and twenty tomahawks to keep her safe. Look slippy, we ought to be getting back."

Child spat the quid of betelnut out of his mouth, staining the ground at his feet with crimson. His pupils were enormously dilated, the surface of the eyes like glass. He spoke monotonously, as if he scarcely knew what he was saying. The chief, who seemed to regard him as different in some occult way from the other whites, drew close to him, and listened. At the end he nodded his head

with a dislocating jerk, snatched a yam from one of his henchmen, handed it to Child, and walked off.

"That's the guest-gift," said Child, still staring. "He's agreed."

"Hop it, man, hop it, we've not any too much time," cried Fursey impatiently. "We don't want an exploring expedition to Wawaka, with me away."

"I don't like it," said Child without stirring.

"Damn it, what don't you like? When did you get the right to talk about what you like and what you don't, anyway? Don't you know these people will look after the little tart all right till things blow over? Don't you know they wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole?"

"I know it a dashed sight better than you do."

"Well, then, what's the trouble? I've stood about all from you I'm going to stand." The tone was threatening, and Child, through all the stupor of his betelnut drunk, seemed to feel it so. He winced visibly. Deirdre watched him in terror. Was her one friend going to desert her?

"I don't understand—things," said Child stupidly. "I forget—and everything muddles itself. But I—I—want to stay here."

"Stay here? What in —— for?"

"I—you couldn't get to Wawaka tonight if I've to come too."

"We'll see about that. You can hurry if you like—or if I like."

"You'd better let me stay. You know I can't do anything against you. But—suppose the place got raided?"

"It's not going to be."

"It might," said Child, who was making a fierce

effort to regain his clearness of mind, and evidently succeeding. "It would be no good to any of us, if she got knocked on the head. You—you'd better let me stay, Fursey."

"Not to let her escape," said Fursey, watching him narrowly. "You know what would come of that."

"I know. . . . I want to stop in case of trouble. These chaps are all right, I suppose, but one would like to make sure they're at peace with their neighbours."

"Well, you can stay till tomorrow, but no longer. I want you to show up at Wawaka. You can talk to these johnnies here, and make them understand. I know you can." He laughed with what seemed to be a secret meaning, and Deirdre, again, saw the other man flinch ever so little under the lash of Fursey's words. . . . Why?

"So long," said the small rascal, hurrying out through the gateway. He had no light with him; he had passed the intricate defences of the town but once, in the dark. Nevertheless he seemed assured of finding his way. The tall chief followed his departure with moving eyes in an immobile iron face. "Mgh!" he grunted approvingly. Then he walked over to where Deirdre was standing, uncertain where to go or what to do. In the wavering light he looked at her, taking her in from head to foot—her long, half-knotted hair, her white face and amber eyes, the soiled print dress that hid her slim body, save for hands and feet. These, too, he looked at, attentively, an expression of profound disgust struggling with his chief-like immobility of countenance.

"Wrrgh!" was his one remark. He spat violently on the ground.

"He no like," gurgled Kalaka delightedly. "Him tink you one oogly woman." She burst into a pleased titter. It was wine to her woman's vanity.

Deirdre was conscious of a deep thankfulness. This was not at all like the tales in books, where the savage chieftain always complicated things by falling in love with the beautiful white woman. One difficulty, one danger, the less, was to be feared. She had heard that dark men do not naturally admire white women; that it takes the coming of civilization to create difficulties of this kind, between race and race. But she had not—quite—believed it. Her vanity of sex forbade. Now she saw that it was true—she saw herself an object of scorn and dislike to men—for the first time in her life—and she could have sung hymns of joy.

Child, once Fursey was gone, had relapsed into his betelnut dream, and was seated on the ground, chewing and spitting red streams. She felt an infinite disgust for the white man—the man of her own class—sunk so low; she was beginning to fear that he had sunk even beyond what she had guessed. Yet it was well to have him there. Anything of one's own colour! . . .

Reaction—the force that snatches us back from disintegration and death, a million times in a life, failing us but once, and that once the last time of all—was beginning to lift her spirits again. She would get out of this—somehow. Who would have thought she could have come, safe and unharmed, through the terrors of these last twenty-four hours? Yet here she was, tired and dirty and hungry, but

in no way the worse. She would win through—she would!

Food was brought out by and by. Deirdre eyed it with uneasy apprehension at first; she knew she must be among the cannibal towns, and there was no knowing what might not be served up at the communal meal now beginning to be spread on the ground. But she saw nothing worse than pig, wrapped in green leaves, baked bananas, yams, arrowroot boiled and tied up in tiny puddings. The men squatted down first, and ate, not greedily, but slowly, and with what might have been called very fair table manners. When they had done, the women, squatting patiently outside the ranks of diners, followed them, and squabbled over the remains.

Child, suddenly waking up, called in a voice of thunder to Kalaka. What he said, Deirdre did not know, but it took effect. The savage girl brought food to both; hot yams and sweet potatoes, served on plaited mats protected by green leaves. She recompensed herself for the service by making a face at Child, and treading, as she left, on Deirdre's foot.

There was water in a tall bamboo, leaning against one of the houses. Child tipped it, and handed it to the girl. He drank after her. Then he said, wiping his mouth on what remained of a torn sleeve—

"I was a gentleman—once."

"What happened?" asked Deirdre. They were sitting side by side, upon a log used by the women for beating out tappa cloth. A dance was getting up among the natives. Oiled till each muscle stood

out in high lights, painted black, white and red, decorated with red flowers set in their hair, and with green and white grasses tucked into the arm and leg bands that were their only clothing, the men of the nameless village were beginning their nightly amusement. It seemed, tonight, to be a special occasion; more and more food was being carried in through the narrow trap gateway, and piled in heaps before the drum trees, women had drawn themselves up into a long row, and holding wands in their hands, shuffled and hummed incessantly. By and by someone began to beat the drum trees, and, in an instant, the whole town rang with a horrible, dull fierce clamour, the very essence of savagery. The trees were ten to fifteen feet in height, hollowed inside, and carved at the top into frightful grinning faces, with long tongues that wagged and waved under the thundering of the beater's stick.

Child's answer could scarcely be heard amidst the uproar.

"Many things," Deirdre thought him to say. "The last—ended. Betelnut—betelnut—it's death, moral death to a white man. You'll do anything."

Somehow, she was not afraid of him. Her woman's instinct told her that the soul of the man still lived. Did Fursey's live? Had he ever had a soul? . . .

"You can get back," she persisted. "There's always a way."

"Is there?" said Child, turning his blue eyes, glassy with the drug, upon her. "What way?"

Deirdre considered. Things in books rushed back to her—half recollected—vague. "If you could do some good thing—some great good thing," she

found at last. "It would be a kind of stairway. I don't speak well—that noise makes my mind go round and round."

It was increasing every minute; many more had taken a hand, and the whole grove of drums was in action, booming like an angry sea. "It's meant to be hypnotizing—that, and the women's waving and shuffling about," she thought in a parenthesis. "They've always known about those things."

Child was not looking at the drummers; the whole wild scene had too long been known to him. "You think I could wipe things out?" he said at last.

"Oh, don't take me literally—what does one know? I'm only quoting what somebody has said somewhere."

The big man was silent for a while. "Too late," he said by and by. "You don't know everything. God forbid. . . ." He stopped.

The dance was working up. Round and round the central group of drum trees fled the men dancers, heads down and arms out, sailing over the ground like birds of prey. Deirdre, half drugged by the thunderous sound of the drumming, and the endless, monotonous shuffle of the women's dance, watched as one watches in a heavy stifling dream. She saw, in this dream, the iron-faced chief, old man though he was, leading the dance with the lightness of a youth, performing wonders of muscular activity, without the slightest change of his set, inhuman countenance. She saw the others, following him and imitating, as she now understood, the hover and pounce of a bird of prey, chasing its victim. She traced, scarce knowing that she did so, the resemblance running through all the dance to the sinister,

black things, half bat, half bird, that made the avenue of idols hideous, down on the far-away coast. . . . The dance grew hotter; they had taken up their guns, and were dancing madly and more madly, round the drum trees, cocked and loaded weapons on their shoulders. All the noise that had gone before was as nothing to the thunder-drumming that now began, shot through with the women's long, howling screams. A blind man, an idiot, could not but have known that something was coming—something going to happen. . . .

Through the trap gateway, bending low, and then staggering to full height under the load of the burdens that they bore, came four men, two and two. Between them, each couple carried what seemed to be a heavy weight—something long, wrapped up in cerements of green leaves, and tied to a pole.

The girl heard Child say something to himself—a short, sharp word. He was on his feet. He had taken her hand.

“Come out of this,” he said, leading her to the nearest building—a low-roofed, long thatch house, surrounded by a fence of bamboo. “There's no one here—come inside.” They were almost running, Child pulling her along. He kept her with her back to the dance. A lame old man crept forward, and made threatening sounds; it seemed he did not want them to go in; he shook his feeble arm. Child looked full at him, and then drew his own hand, sharply, across his mouth at the distance of an inch or two, as he had done in the presence of the men who guarded the gateway. The old man laughed, surprised. He turned away, and left them to themselves.

“Come in,” said Child hoarsely, through the

furious thunder of the drums. "You can't see—I mean, it's quiet in here." He pulled her through the doorway, which was a "canoe" doorway of ancient pattern, narrow and very high. Inside, there was solitude, and when the door was shut, a certain measure of peace.

Child struck a match, and, feeling for a candlenut torch—he seemed to know just where everything was to be found—lighted it. Beneath the smoky flare, Deirdre looked about her. The place appeared to be a sort of mausoleum. Skulls, some new, some sienna brown with age, were set in rows like jampots, on high shelves; arm and leg bones were stacked in sets and laid away on the rafters. There were heavy carved mauls, at whose use she shudderingly guessed; drumsticks, painted and cut in patterns; adzes, with ugly human faces glaring from the handles. At the far end of the building, as Child raised aloft his torch, she could see things stranger yet—a staring array of skeletons, roughly fashioned into mummies by means of paint and stuffing; and at the very end of all . . . what was it?

Silently Child moved nearer, and held up the light. And Deirdre saw—without guessing how very nearly the strange thing was to touch her and her future, but yet with considerable awe—a seated silent figure of a man. At first she thought he was alive, immobile though he was. Then she saw that he was dead—dead, and stuffed. Not roughly as the padded skeletons had been fashioned; they, his waiting court, were but bone and painted fibre. The seated corpse was stuffed, as a bird or animal is stuffed—skin treated with some preservative chemical, painted red, and filled with wadding; bones carefully inserted in the right place; limbs disposed

as in life, wrapped up, amulet hung upon his breast. The face was a mask of painted clay, moulded over the skull into some attempt at a likeness. The hair was a fibre wig. The eyes of the man were cleverly represented by two of the green, white and blue "cat's-eye" gems that are found in shells upon island coral reefs. In the limp, glove-like fingers of one hand he held a club. A band of shells in his hair seemed to represent a crown.

So, seated dead amidst his court of dead men, the savage king kept state.

Almost forgetting how she had come to this place—how small was her chance of leaving it alive—Deirdre stared in wonder.

"Have you ever seen anything like that?" she asked Child.

"Hardly ever," he answered in his monotonous voice. "It's only their big kings they do up in that fashion. It's something to have seen it. They kill anyone who dares to look into these temples of theirs, as a rule."

"But how could you—" began the girl.

Child looked at her strangely.

"They would never kill me," was all he said. For some uncomprehended cause, Deirdre felt she could not dwell on the point; she hurried to another.

"What are they doing outside?"

"Nothing."

"That's nonsense. If it is nothing, I shall go out."

Child reached forward—he seemed to be able to stretch over half the house, and took her arm in a firm grasp. "You can't," he said.

"They're not fighting," argued Deirdre. "They're only having another feast. I can smell—" the words died on her lips. Suddenly, instantly, she

knew what it was they were cooking; where the bodies of the carriers had gone. . . .

She said no more about leaving the temple shelter.

They stayed for an hour or two. Kalaka came once or twice and looked in, saying something to Child. He answered her dully and briefly, and she went away again.

Deirdre, seated for very weariness on the ground, beaten into a passive, hypnotic state, by the endless bellowing of the drums, and almost half asleep, was waked, at last, to full attention, by an unexpected happening outside. The cannibals, ending their meal, began to sing. At the same time the drums, abruptly, ceased their thunder, and there was peace.

So great was the relief, at first, that she hardly noticed what the singing was like; it was enough that that crazing thunder had stopped at last. But in a minute the melody began to catch her ears—the keen ears of a composer.

“Why, it’s good—listen!” she exclaimed. Child, with an air of untellable weariness, was leaning his huge slack body up against the walls of the death-temple, staring emptily at the roof.

“I don’t know anything about those things,” he said. “I never knew one tune from another, even when I was . . .” He stopped.

Deirdre, roused to interest, took no notice of him. “Listen,” she said, again. “Why it’s hardly savage music at all—hear that modulation. These people can sing!”

“Cannibals,” observed Child, in answer to the tone of amazement in her voice, “are generally more intelligent than the other kind. Victors—survival of what-is-it? I used to know all about that, when . . .” The sentence trailed off again.

During nearly an hour, the wild concert continued, one man singing a solo now and then, to be taken up at intervals by full-throated chorus. The tunes were monotonous, brief in range, and there seemed to be few of them, for after the first half hour the singers did nothing but repeat. Still, the character of the music was very far from poor, and it went with a splendid swing. The conclusion was irresistible, that these cannibal brutes could, and would, handle better music, if they had the opportunity.

"They told me something about this at the Mission," breathed Deirdre. "The converts used to sing wonderfully; just give them an air, and they simply ate it up. But I did not know these people—"

"Same people," said Child sleepily. "I heard the chief—fellow with the tin face on him—once brained a chap from another village for stealing one of their songs. Eat him too. Made sure."

The singing had stopped. The village seemed settling down to rest. Kalaka, looking as usual, handsome, fierce and sulky, came to the door, dressed in a fringe of grass, and beckoned to Deirdre to come out.

"Woman no stop along diss house," she said. "You come woman house wit' me. You sleep along me, no lun away."

The women's house, where the unmarried girls slept under guard—a sentry with a gun watching the door, lest neighbouring tribes should break in and steal—was not far from the temple. Child gave Deirdre to understand that he would sleep at the door of the temple himself. "If you want me, you can call me," he said.

She thanked him, and went.

All that night—it was not a long one, for the feast and the concert had run on till nearly dawn—Deirdre lay, unwillingly, close to the fierce Kalaka, held even in sleep by the native girl's strong arm. She herself slept little. This was a worse night than the last, bad though that had been. What might the next one bring? . . . Oh, the little, white safe room in the Residency, with the night light and the frog, and Mrs. Carbery's snoring on one side, and Blackbury's heavy weight creaking his chain stretcher at the other! Oh, what one would give to be there—to wake from this horrible dream!

But the only dream she woke from was the troubled, tossed vision that assailed her, close to dawn, in which she found herself slipping—slipping—down a long black slope that ended in a blank nothingness, while Fursey and the chief with the iron-devil face stood capering at the top. . . .

With morning, hope revived, as hope often does. Conn would discover her. Blackbury would bring a body of police up, and raid the town. The man-of-war would come in, and the captain would find out what had happened, and rescue her, and take everyone, more or less, off to trial and jail, in Fiji. She managed to feel quite cheerful for a little while.

Then, the sight of Child sitting like a native on the ground at the door of the temple, chewing his eternal betelnut, struck her with a sense of chilling weakness and dismay. That!—all she had to depend on! That thing, which had once been white, a gentleman, a man—and was now—she feared to think what. . . .

There was no use hoping that Conn or Blackbury

would guess. How could they? If she had found Conn's clothes lying beside the swimming bath, and Conn nowhere to be seen, would she not have concluded that he had been drowned in those tempting dangerous waters beyond the guardian fence? If she had not been certain—if she had perhaps induced Blackbury to question natives, hunt all over Wawaka, what would the result have been? Nothing at all. No one would have seen any white person being taken to Wawaka Island. No one would have found anything amiss on the island itself. Friends on Meliasi would have waited, wondered a little, grieved a great deal, and then given the missing one up for lost. Would not they? *Had* not they? She was sure they had.

And yet—

Yet—if it were she who sought—if the missing one were Conn—she would never have quite believed him dead, until she had seen his body lying at her feet.

Some of the men were going out of the village. She watched them with a certain dull interest. Already the heaviness of the captive mind began to be hers. Trifles obsessed her; she stared and gaped, conscious all the while of deep underlying terror that she dared not think about. The men were loaded with goods—fruit from their gardens; sweet potatoes, yams. Women, not men, carried the loads as a rule. She wondered.

Kalaka, squatting near, and smoking a bamboo pipe, took it out of her mouth long enough to remark in a superior manner—

“Him go makiti.”

“Makiti?”

"Makiti—one man him sellem somet'ing, 'nother man him buy. Salt-water man havem salt, shell. Man-bush havem yam, fotato."

"Market—where?" It seemed odd to her that the coast and the hill tribes, so patently afraid of one another, should venture to meet on a mere commercial pretext.

Kalaka, who seemed in a better temper to-day, condescended to explain. The hill men and the salt-water men, it seemed, never met unless to kill. But each had goods that the other required. Therefore they arranged to travel to a point midway, where the hill tribes, arriving first, laid down their goods on a stone, and then, retiring into the forest, called out in loud song to let the salt-water men know they were honestly going back. Still singing, they retired till they could be no longer heard. At this point of the negotiations the coastal men came up, singing also, examined the goods, left an equivalent, and retired—still singing. The hill men came down, left signs to show approval or disapproval, and went back repeating the previous performance of song. This might go on all day if the parties were not satisfied, and the bargaining was keen; it might go on into the next day—or it might end at the first stage, after only one or two bouts of "setting to partners." All the time, neither party of traders was ever within a mile of the other. If either party stopped singing, it was the signal for a charge and a fight, to anticipate the treachery suggested by silence.

Thus Kalaka. Deirdre listened with dull interest, until suddenly, a stray word from Kalaka stung her into life.

"Very good my countryman he sing, more better dan salt-water man. Very good sing him havem. One time, salt-water man him stealem my countryman sing, my countryman cut him liver out. One time, him too good sing my countryman, den dat Chief Conn him take him sing, dat Chief Conn him singem all-a-same, along fiano."

Deirdre judged this to mean that, Conn enamoured of some of the mountain people's airs, had taken down one or two, and sung them at his own piano.

Kalaka went on to say that her countrymen, being in awe of the Chief Conn, had omitted to cut out his liver according to etiquette, but that they had asked him to send payment of "tobacco," and that he had done so. It seemed he came to the monthly market himself as often as not, away down near the shore, and that he often amused himself singing their songs.

Did he wait for the mountain party to come down, after the shore party had retired? Deirdre asked, with throbbing heart. She knew the natives' incurable propensity for gossip. She thought it impossible Conn should not hear something from them.

Kalaka dashed her hopes instantly. No, the mountain men did not wait. They were too much afraid of Conn. He was a friend of the King (Blackbury) and he might tell the King things they had done that would make him angry. The King was always getting angry about nothing at all. Once he had told the man-of-war about the white trader the mountain men had taken away and eaten, and the man-of-war had shot big guns into the bush, and destroyed their villages.

Fursey would have known, reflected Deirdre dully. Of course he must have known—that there was no danger in this monthly market business, conducted at gunshot length, or he would never have brought her up here to hide her away. There was no hope there.

Unless. . . .

She sat straight up on the ground, charged with a new idea.

What if she got these men to carry her message for her?

She put her hand to her head, and tossed back the heavy hair. She wanted to think.

Only a few of the men had gone. The rest were sitting and loafing about the village. By Kalaka's account, they would not leave till afternoon. It was considered best for the marketers to go in two different parties, as an added precaution against treachery.

Deirdre looked at them, and her plan sprang full-grown in her brain.

"This man he no sing good," she said scornfully, to Kalaka.

The girl blazed at once.

"Him sing damn good. Him sing all-a-same pigeon long bush." (Pigeon being the native word for any variety of winged fowl.)

"Him no savvy my sing," went on Deirdre, watching closely.

"Mgh!" grunted Kalaka, uneasy and contemptuous.

Deirdre smiled a small fine smile. She knew—none better—that her songs, for all that they were in no sense "classical"—perhaps because of that—were peerless in their appeal to the popular mind.

She had just had evidence of the musical tastes and tendencies owned by these extraordinary cannibals.

"I believe they would," she breathed. "I believe I'll try."

She put back her head, opened her lips, and sent out the gay clear notes of the song that, beyond all others, had made her popular and famous—"Gypsy Lover." She sang it through from beginning to end; it was short, like most of her songs, but it carried much in a small compass, and the melody was irresistible. When she came to the last verse, she sang it twice over.

"Far away, far away, where the hills are calling,
To the open roadway, to the roof of heaven's blue,
To the last long camp of all, where life's last dusk is
falling,
Gypsy lover, gypsy lover, I'll go with you!"

Into her mind as she sang came, stabbingly, the memory of the day when she last had sung that song—could it be such a little while ago? The sun among the mango trees, sinking low; white pathways, red flowers lying in drifted heaps; herself among the flowers, singing to her lover. . . .

Here, full sun was blazing on the dusty square of the village; dark, sinister creatures were squatting in ugly nakedness; there was a feeling, almost a smell, of blood in the air; danger, sickening, overpowering, hovered like a cloud, or like one of the nightmare birds in the idol lane of Meliasi.

And she was singing—she was singing to these cannibal creatures—singing of happy love among the blue hills and long cool roads of England, she, loveless, and like to die, here in the terrible New

Cumberlands, whither she never, never should have come.

She was startled from her mood of bitter memory by a strange—an incredible sound. Two or three of the young men were picking up her air, with every symptom of delight, repeating phrase after phrase, singing it to nothing at all, to native words improvised on the spur of the moment, to the rhythmic beats of a little, musical-sounding hand drum, that someone had fetched from a house.

They had caught her song!

There it went—“*Far away, far away . . . roof of heaven's blue. . .*” Heaven alone—or the other place—knew what words they might be putting to it. But they were singing it, and with gusto. They jumped up and sang it standing, dancing. They beat the measure with their hands. They had got it right—you could hardly miss the tune of “Gypsy Lover” if you knew one tune from another—they were singing it better and better every minute. The whole village joined in, and as it had rung on the night before, to the sound of the native melodies, so it rang this morning to the notes of Deirdre’s merry gypsy tune, sung by lips on which the blood of human victims was not yet dry.

“Him takit makiti!” cried Kalaka, foreseeing credit and triumph for her town. “Him takit makiti, him sing it for de damn salt-water man.”

For the rest of that day, Dierdre had reason, if ever she had had in her life, to tire, to become sick, of her own music.

She was glad when, the sun being high, and the first party long away, it was thought good for the second party to leave. After they had gone, the

village settled down to quiet. Child was asleep—he had not yet started as Fursey had ordered him to do. In fact, he did not seem to have any intention of leaving the place. Most of the women had gone to work in the gardens; nearly all the men were away to market. Some few old men, and the guard that never left the gateway, were left. Kalaka, too, remained, and kept a watchful eye on Deirdre. But the captive girl had no intention of attempting an escape. She had seen from the first that in this stockaded village, with its one guarded gate, escape could not be thought of.

What then? If Conn, by some miraculous chance, found out where she was, before it was too late, and brought a body of armed white men, to rescue her, could she be rescued? She doubted even that. In a village where every man had a gun, and used it without hesitation—where the place must be taken by storm, if at all, and not in any case without fierce fighting—her chance of surviving a furious fire between attackers and defenders would be very small. Fursey, of course, had known all that, had calculated on it, with his own devilish cunning. Child was her friend, in so far as he could be any use, but she feared that that was not far.

Seated on the ground, in the shade of one of the squat thatched houses, she mused, and her thoughts were not happy ones. She looked up at last, to see the immense figure of Child shambling towards her across the open square. He seemed to have given up his drug for the present. His mouth was no longer stained dark red, his eyes had lost their glassy look. The effects of the betelnut, however—so much worse with a white

man than with a black—still showed in the intense weariness of his white face, the dullness of his expression. He looked like one who had been dead, and who was scarce yet recalled to life.

"I wanted to say to you," he spoke heavily, "that you needn't be too much afraid. There may be a way."

"What way?" asked the girl, looking up at him. She did not put overmuch faith in any promise of Child's.

"I can't tell you that. But if anyone finds out you're here—"

"Why can't you go and tell them?" interrupted Deirdre, somewhat sharply. She found it hard to have patience with this wreck.

"I could do that," answered the big man, "but if I did, it would come to the same in the end, and you wouldn't be helped."

"I don't understand you a single bit."

"Don't you see, if you're in the middle of a fight between the cannibals and the whites, you are pretty dead sure to have your head blown off."

"Yes, I see—but what do you mean by its coming to the same in the end?"

"I mean this. There is something I might do—to set you free of the village. But it can only be done if I'm here and stay here. To get you out is the thing."

"Well, if there is something you can do, why haven't you done it?" asked Dreirdre, trying hard to have patience.

Child looked at her strangely.

"I'll do it, don't you fear," he said. "Do you know the poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon?"

"What one in particular?" asked Deirdre, won-

dering if the drug had driven him mad. She did know Gordon, of course—all sea-gypsies do.

“The one about the girl who died—

“‘I said in my heart, when his shadow crossed. . . .’”

“Oh yes, I remember part of it. It goes on, doesn’t it—

“‘What does it matter for one soul lost,
Millions of souls have been lost before.’”

Is that it?”

“Yes,” said Child, turning away from her.
“That’s it.”

She did not see his face, as he went back, without another word, to his shelter in the doorway of the temple. The day declined; blue shadows crept across the burning dust of the square; the women came back from their gardens; smoke of cooking fires began to rise. Still Child sat there, unmoving, looking down.

CHAPTER XV

THE strong south-east was booming about the Residency verandahs. The Commissioner, the French Commissioner, Conn and Mrs. Carbery had found a sheltered spot on the verandah that looked northward, and, under the light of Blackbury's great swinging lamp, were talking, slowly, with long gaps between their sentences.

They were all depressed and tired. It was three days now since Deirdre's disappearance. Only the faintest hope had existed that she might not have been drowned. Blackbury had little, Conn not much, and Mrs. Carbery, supported by the persistent coming up of "Coffin cards," had been sure from the first that the "lady gurl" was at the bottom of the harbour. "She would be always blandandherin' me to leave her go outside," explained Deirdre's chaperon, "and for all I would be tellin' her that sharks and all manner was in it, she would be girnin' to go. Sure, when she went down her lone, it would be to go over the fince, and over it she will have wint, God rest her soul."

Blackbury, dealing cards with a slower hand than usual to Des Roseaux (the two had taken up their ancient game of *écarté* of late; it seemed that no one had heart for the new game of bridge) was of opinion, when asked, that Deirdre had taken cramp. The sudden change from the hot swimming

bath to the cold waters outside might have brought it on. A shark would have been seen by someone; he understood that there had been a canoe with a native in it not very far outside. . . .

He had had the question of the canoe looked up, conscientiously, but without expecting to hear anything of moment. The native who had been in it was not forthcoming, and no one could or would tell anything about him. This, Blackbury thought natural enough. The New Cumberlanders were shy of the Residency; and no doubt the paddler of the canoe had heard of the white girl's death, and feared he might be blamed for it.

Des Roseaux alone had doubts. Des Roseaux would not let the matter alone. When Conn, half mad by now with remorse and grief, swore at him roundly, and told him to hold his silly cackle, the Frenchman still persisted. How did they know she was not still alive? How did they know Fursey was not at the bottom of this?

"Damn it, man, didn't we comb the whole of Wawaka from the house to the beach, and back again?" demanded Conn, looking up, fierce-eyed, from the heavy fit of musing into which he had fallen. "Didn't we see Fursey and his crew? Was there a sign of her there?"

"Me, I find that this Fursey has been too explanatory," persisted Des Roseaux. "He has explained so many things that we don't ask. We not desire to know what he's been doing all the week and yesterday. We not desire to know he has been lying sick in the house the morning she has disappeared."

"If I had my way, he would be a jolly sight sicker," commented Conn. "You wouldn't let me have it out of him."

"My dear chap," remonstrated Blackbury, looking up from his cards, "you must try and remember some of us are here to make an attempt towards creating order. I've had to pull you up once for behaving like a Red Indian."

Conn did not seem to hear him. "If I had a grain of hope that he knew anything," he went on, "but I don't see just where his interest would have been in playing any of his tricks. I certainly did think he might follow her and annoy her, if he found her away from the island without escort, so I advised her not to go cruising about alone anywhere. But carrying her off—after what I gave him for his conduct at my house, it isn't likely."

"Fursey has carried off one lady, isn't it?" asked the French Commissioner, regarding his hand of cards with a somewhat absent air.

"Yes—more or less; of course she went sailing in his boat, and allowing him to play the fool. This is another matter. Bad as he is, I don't judge he would dare to do it, just for a freak."

"Just for a freak—no. But, my old man, can you think of any other reason, not perhaps a freak?"

"What d'ye mean?" snapped Conn, turning round sharply.

"You were engaged to this lady, isn't it?"

"I—yes."

"Perfectly. Without doubt you loved her. When a man is engaged to a woman, a woman which he loves—because, my old man, we don't always love that woman which we marry—well, then, does he not tell her all? Even that which he ought not perhaps to tell? Blackbury, old rascal, have you not told your lady some things which—"

"We all do," agreed Blackbury, cutting him short. "More fools we. You play, Des Roseaux."

Des Roseaux, selecting his card with as much nice care as if his life depended on the choice, laid it, slowly, down on the table. Immediately afterwards he detached himself from *écarté*, in gross and in detail, and turned to Conn, shaking a long forefinger emphatically at the younger man.

"Oh, my Conn, tell the truth—have you not told the little Mademoiselle Deirdre where is your treasure, and what?"

"If I did?" parried Conn.

"Head of a Britannic pig, my friend, can you not see what comes after?"

"He could not know," said Conn, springing to his feet. "How was he to— My God, if he has, I'll kill him, as sure as my name's—"

"You won't, whether he has or not," cut in Blackbury. He, too, had relinquished his cards, and turned round in his chair to look at Conn. They were all looking at Conn now. The young man's face had turned the curious lemon-white that sunburned faces turn, in moments of strong feeling. His eyes were mere dots of fire under their drawn-down brows; his mouth was open and trembling with rage. He tried to speak, half choked, and tried again.

"I'll kill him," he repeated, as if he had not heard Blackbury. "Des Roseaux, by God, I think you're right. I have been a fool. The loss of her seemed to beat me down so that I could not think. But where is she—where is she?" He laid a powerful hand on the slight shoulder of Des Roseaux, and shook him, in his excitement.

"Finish then, you are shaking my bones! Where

is she? Do I know. But if I'm right, my old man, I would, myself, go walk the country, and see if I shall not hear something."

"There's a market tomorrow," mused Conn. "Bush tribes come down to leave goods, shore tribes come up and leave price—you know it."

"Without doubt; it is my business to know these things."

"All the coast johnnies will be there. If he has had her spirited away to some other island, one might—thank you, Des Roseaux, thank you. You've given me new life." He was on his feet, taking down his helmet from the nail where it had hung all the afternoon.

"You will go home?"

"Yes—yes, I must get ready to be off at daylight." He had hardly a word now; his face was set with some firm purpose, that needed no expression in speech. The yellow-white tinge had left him.

Blackbury, stacking his cards together to put them away, remarked, without looking up—

"No Red Indian business, Conn. But ask me for anything you want—boys, boats, what you like. Myself, if needed."

"Yes," agreed Conn briefly. A word of good-bye to Mrs. Carbery, and he was gone.

"Last night," remarked the lady sepulchrally, "I dhrew it down with the cards that there was coffins, and inimies; and the inimies did be in it like fleas in a blanket. It be to be, I'm thinking, that the inimies was for him, and the coffin was for her, rest her soul." She took out a large, clean trade pocket handkerchief surrounded with alphabets in

red and blue, placed it before her eyes, and left the verandah.

Blackbury, sighing heavily, looked at Des Roseaux.

"Rosy," he said, using the familiar name that for the sake of Commissioner dignity, he never pronounced before others, "Rosy—do you actually think there may be anything in this?"

"I don't to know very well what I think," confessed Des Roseaux, "but all what I have said is quite possible. And if something had not happen to take Mr. Conn out of himself, why, my friend, there are too many firearms in this country, for to be safe to a young man, much disappointed in love."

"Now I had rather thought," mused Blackbury, "that they had quarrelled."

"But naturally! They are lovers; it is the trade of lovers, to quarrel. All the more was it bad he should have no thing to take him from himself, with this, that ate into him. Say, Blackbury, once you have quarrelled with the lady for which you remain bachelor?"

John Bull, leaning on one hand, and holding on, as it were, to his own curly, grizzling locks, shook his wise head ever so little. "It was the other thing, Rosy," he said. "There are only two."

"Not quarrel, therefore not woman—it was then money?"

"Put it want of money, Rosy, and you come near the mark. Lack of all money, and you hit the mark. Beggars, Rosy, can't be choosers, especially of titled ladies."

"She has been noble?"

"Aye," said John Bull. "Noble. And a noble-

woman, too. She is the Marchioness of Kirkpatrick."

"But—Blackbury—the Marquis of Kirkpatrick has died!"

"Six months ago," agreed John Bull calmly, putting away his cards.

"And you—?"

"And I—I'm British Commissioner of the New Cumberlands. Goodnight, Des Roseaux. And—look! Be sure you let me know of anything you hear. God knows but there might be something in it."

"In the affair of Miss Deirdre?"

"Aye—what else?"

CHAPTER XVI

KALAKA came across the dusty square, her grass skirts swaying, the native ornaments of bead and tooth, of pearl-shell and clam-shell and carved tusk, which she had resumed since her return, clinking with the quickness of her walk. She grinned unpleasantly at Child and Deirdre, who were sitting in the shade of the big temple, and remarked—

“Fursey, he come.”

“What!” cried Deirdre, springing to her feet, her face white as the clouds above. Like the sound of hang-man’s feet along the corridor, to the prisoner trembling in the condemned cell, was this sudden, unexpected announcement of Kalaka’s to her. Fursey! But he had said four days, and it was only two! Four days might have given her a chance—Conn might have got together a force of the white people, and ventured the risk of taking the town by storm—surely he would know that it was better than the risk of leaving her there! Child might have thought out some scheme, dulled and blurred as his mind seemed to be. She herself— But Fursey was returning, and there had not even been time—had there? She could not be sure—for the hazardous, uncertain message of her song to make its way.

Fursey returning!

It was late on the afternoon of the day that followed the market. The men had come back, bring-

ing with them goods from the tribes of the island and the shore—salt in green-leaf packets; dried fish; store of sea-shells and turtle-shell for the making of native jewellery. The singing of Deirdre's air still went on; it had taken the village like a plague. She thought that, if she survived this terrible adventure—if she lived to be an old, old woman, in countries far away—never would she hear anyone singing "Gypsy Lover" without instantly seeing the whole strange place—the dark death temple at the end of the village, the grove of drum trees, with their hideous human faces, in the middle; the groups of naked brown men, herding in shadow, their long, ever-restless gun-barrels gleaming and moving faintly like reed-beds of steel. She would smell, she knew, the smell of dust and decay, wood-smoke, pig, wet forest that filled the village; would hear the thunder-drumming that made horrible the evenings; tremble again, as she had trembled, hiding in a corner of the temple, while things unknown, unnameable, were being done outside. . . .

If she got away.

There had been some chance of that last night. Tonight, with Kalaka's news beating in her pulses like some bewildering drug, with Fursey—how near—to the town, she knew that there could be almost none.

"When he come?" she asked the girl breathlessly.

Kalaka, answering, in a flood of native, was translated by Child. Fursey, it seemed, had been sighted by the spies of the village, early that morning, coming across from Wawaka Island. The spies who had seen him were tree-top spies, perched on the border of the coastal natives' country. They had

called the news to the nearest of the chain that stretched, at distances of a mile or so, right up to the village. During the course of the morning, the news had leaped across a distance that no man could have travelled under many hours. Fursey was a good way behind it; but they thought he would be there by the time the moon was up.

Thus Kalaka, grinning with malicious delight. She was quite aware that Deirdre feared and hated Fursey, and the fact seemed to console her, more or less, for the neglect of herself that she saw impending in the immediate future. Besides—did not native custom compel a recent wife to serve an older one? Kalaka thought there might be fun, for a brown woman charged with hatred against the white, in the new arrangement.

Child, speaking in native, asked her a question. She answered it, nodding her head, with the word, "Smitti!"

Smith! Too well Deirdre understood that her worst fears were likely to be realized. Fursey was coming, days earlier than he had been expected, and was bringing with him Smith, the renegade missionary; Smith, who was qualified to marry them. . . .

Something must have happened. Fursey had evidently been scared by some movement on the part of the white people. The tale of her drowning, well though it had been concocted, might have failed at some essential point to convince. . . . If that were so, he would be doing just what he was doing—travelling up hot-foot with the intention of protecting himself by a forced marriage!

Deirdre knew—who was better versed in melancholy knowledge of marriage laws than she?—that no marriage of hers would hold good in law. But

where would be the use of telling Furseys this? It might sign her own death-warrant. It could not save her from him.

Her limbs seemed to give way under her. She dropped on the log, and sat staring, twisting her hands together. Conn would come—she knew it. But he might come too late.

Through all the trouble, the thought of saving herself by disclosing Conn's secret never had appealed to her as in any way possible, or useful. She was not so wildly romantic as to contemplate saving the secret of the treasure at the cost of her own life or honour. But she had known all along it would be no use to tell. Furseys had but dangled freedom before her as a bunch of carrots is dangled before a donkey's nose. It was against all his interests to let her go, and when had he ever studied anything but his interests?

She might be driven, by terrible means, to the disclosure, once thoroughly in his power, if he were certain she would not tell him without force. But on such a possibility, she did not dare to dwell. She had one thing to think of, one only—how to get away. Within the hours—how few!—before the rising of the moon, lay her last chance.

Child, his enormous limbs outspread on the ground beside her like a fallen tree, looked up, and seemed to guess what she was thinking.

"It can be done," he said. Kalaka had moved off. "I can get you out—if I stay behind myself."

"Not to let them kill you? I could not—"

"There isn't a chance of that. Don't worry. But—if you do get out, it doesn't mean getting away. You don't know the bush. They wouldn't chase you—not the men from this village—if I quiet them.

But others might. All the same, you can try—if you wish.”

“What are you going to do?”

Without immediately answering her question, Child said—

“Kalaka will be easily settled. Look here.” He showed her a small gourd bottle with a stopper of wood. Uncorking it, and letting a few crimson drops fall on the ground, he said—

“Betelnut—decoction strong enough to blow off the head of a buffalo. I’ll catch the little jade, and pour it down her neck. She’ll sleep like the dead till tomorrow afternoon.”

“But Fursey—he said he would kill her—”

“So he would—if she was on Wawaka. Not here. The chief is Kalaka’s brother, and he would murder and eat the whole crowd of them. He very nearly did it, time Fursey stole her away, but there was plenty of payment made, and he quieted down.”

“If I can get out!—” cried Deirdre, feeling new hope spring up.

“You’d better have your chance. I can’t do anything till night time.”

“But Fursey will be here!”

“Not till moonrise, eleven o’clock. He didn’t leave Wawaka early, and it’s good twelve hours. I tell you, I’ll do what I can. You’ve made me remember—all sorts of things. I can believe I was once a man, since I’ve met you.”

“Can’t you go back?” cried Deirdre pitifully, to the strange, wild creature, who lay on the ground, looking up out of dead eyes into hers. The dead eyes turned away, as Child answered her, heavily—
“Too late.”

“Keep quiet till then,” he went on presently.

"Don't do or say anything to raise suspicion; it may be difficult. Have patience; we'll hope for the best."

He heaved himself up, lurched across the square and disappeared somewhere among the huts. Deirdre was left alone. All round her the natives, loafing in the shade with their bamboo pipes and their inevitable guns, were singing the air that had taken their fancy. It was like a hive of bees, humming in tune. The incongruity of the whole thing made her feel light-headed. She buried her face in her hands, and tried to think. Tonight—tonight!

What was that? Mindful of Child's warning, she resisted the impulse that beset her, to leap to her feet, and listen eagerly. Instead, she listened, without changing her attitude of despair; listened, but with throbbing heart, and ears sharpened almost to painfulness.

Somebody — outside the town — was singing "Gypsy Lover."

Now this, in view of the fact that the whole tribe had taken possession of the song, was not remarkable. But what was remarkable was the skilful, careful introduction into the air, of fragments from another. She could hardly believe her ears, but the interpolations did sound like—sound like? Why, they were!—scraps from "Your Shadow On My Heart."

Once this conviction took hold of her, she felt a revulsion of spirit so strong that she could have burst into tears. Instead, she sat quite still, and looked about her. Kalaka, drugged, apparently lay sleeping in the shadow of the women's house.

Deirdre, trembling all the while lest the malicious native girl should wake, lifted her head, and cautiously at first, but with full voice, as she saw that

nobody was noticing, sang a line or two of "Your Shadow On My Heart." The singing in the village was beginning to die down; it was the hot hour of the day, when most of the natives slept. She paused, and listened again.

There—it was the tune of "Gypsy Lover" with the same little fragment from the other song, lightly added. Just enough to tell her it was Conn singing, and no native. Not enough to give the fact away to listening ears. No words, just simple vocalizing.

She realized that, if Conn were indeed within ear-shot, he would never risk drawing the fire of the natives on himself, and probably on her, by saying anything. That remained for her. Was Kalaka asleep? She strolled across, and looked, as she passed by, at the plump brown figure lying in the shade of the women's house. If stertorous snores were evidence, Kalaka was resting well. Deirdre had seen the effects of betelnut often enough; she knew that an overdose like that which Child had administered would probably hold for a night and half a day. No danger there. . . .

Returning to her own side of the square, she lifted her voice, and sang the gypsy song. At the end of it, she broke into improvised words, sung to the same tune.

"Can you hear, can you hear, do you understand me?

He is coming back tonight, when the moon comes up,
When it's dark, I will try and get away somehow.

Stay and wait, do not let them know that you are there."

Back to her, from the forest, came the inevitable gypsy song, and then just a line—what was that tune? Oh—from "Come Into the Garden, Maud."

"I am here—am here at the gate alone."

It was quickly vocalized, without words, but Deirdre understood. Conn would be close to the gate, after dark.

"Do not sing—any more—they have almost noticed,"

she sang carelessly. Some of the men were beginning to turn their heads and stare. Perhaps they had noticed something in the quality of the voice not quite like their own. She hoped they had not.

Nothing remained now but to wait; to hope that Child would succeed in his dealings with the men, whatever they might be, and that Fursey would not come too soon. Once outside the guarded gate of the town—once with Steve—she felt she could defy the world. Twelve hours of hard travel lay between her and civilization, such as Meliasi knew; Fursey and his gang were even now on the only road—but there was no use crossing bridges before you came to them.

"Nelson used to say," she reminded herself, "that something always had to be left to chance."

There was not much food to be had that night; only a few cold lumps of yam, and a handful of bananas, which Child secured somewhere, and brought to her.

"They've got another feast on," he explained. "Saving their appetites."

"Won't you have some?"

He looked at her oddly, and shook his head.

She was not hungry, but she ate; it would not do to face the road that night, fasting—the road down which she was to go with Steve. The words of her own song crept into her mind, and nestled there—

"To the last long camp of all, when life's last dusk is falling.

Gypsy lover, gypsy lover, I'll go with you."

Aye and she would. All would be right. She felt it; there was a spirit of prophecy abroad in the air of this strange night, and it was falling on her, as the night itself was falling—gently, surely, irresistibly. She and Steve would be husband and wife, at last. She knew that, as surely as if she had seen the altar made ready, the priest standing before it with his open book. . . .

Again the thunder-drumming began, the dance swept round the idols. The feast tonight was to take place inside one of the houses—the tall house at the opposite end from the temple, belonging to the chief. She could see the women carrying in baskets and bundles of food. No one came, tonight, to save her from the ugly sight of long, swaddled bodies being carried by; she watched it all, with quickened breath and hands turned cold by fear. Child was not to be seen.

He came at last, and she scarcely knew him. He had taken off his European clothes, and was clad almost as the native men—only a cloth round the middle, and a raffle of ornamental leaves and feathers tied to his limbs. She started back with a cry. Child looked at her almost vacantly. His eyes, wide and glassy, showed that the drug had him under its influence again.

"I came to say good-bye," was all his speech.

"Oh, why?—I'll see you again," Deirdre managed to say. There was something in the incident that frightened her; she could not say what.

He did not take the slightest notice.

"I came to say good-bye," he repeated. She stretched out her hand, but he only looked at it, and made no attempt to take it.

There was a moment's silence. He turned his back, slowly, and slowly walked away. She saw him enter the chief's great house. There came a tremendous sound of shouting, and the door was shut.

It grew dark, grew darker; grew on towards moonrise. Deirdre, waiting in an agony, unable to make up her mind—for would not those unmoving figures of riflemen at the gate turn on her and slay her, if she ventured even to approach?—saw a movement run through the ranks of the men and women who waited outside the shut door of the house. For a moment the door opened; there came out a sound of savage cheering; something was said; a laugh went up. . . .

The two riflemen at the gate, looking at her, lowered their guns and laid them on the ground.

Hardly daring to believe she saw right, Deirdre, a wild, dishevelled little figure, crept timorously towards the wolf-mouth gate of the town, doubled herself up, slipped through—the sentries looking all the time deliberately away—and found herself on the dark, wet track outside. Dazzled still by the flaring torches of the town, dazed by the drumming, she could not see where she was; she crept forward a step or two, with hands outstretched, feeling. They touched something live and warm. Before she had time to spring back, Conn's arms were round her, holding her as if never again, in life or death, would they let her go.

CHAPTER XVII

DEIRDRE'S first thought, when released from that long embrace, was purely feminine:

"Thank Heaven he can't see me!"

Since the moment when she had been bundled into Furseys's canoe, her appearance had never cost her a moment of concern. She had accepted Kalaka's gown, glad to cover herself with greater decency than her bathing costume permitted; she had put on Furseys's shoes, rather because she feared the rough mountain roads, than because of any dislike to going barefoot, like a native or a beggar. She had not washed for three days; she had not "done" her hair in the same time, save for an imperfect smoothing out with the Spanish back-comb she wore. And she had not troubled at all, over the ragged, dirty, unkempt appearance she knew herself to present.

Now, in a moment, things were changed, and even as Conn, his arm round her waist to support her, hurried her along the track, she could not help thinking and planning—how to find a stream before broad daylight, and wash her face in it—how to use some pool as a mirror, twist up her long masses of hair becomingly, rub the worst stains of cocoanut and clay out of her poor dress, find a flower, perhaps, and place it in her breast. . . . Surely, if Steve saw her looking as she knew she must look now, he would not love her any more!

As for Conn, two thoughts, while he hurried Deirdre away from the neighborhood of the cannibal town, made fierce turmoil in his breast. The first was—Fursey. He longed, as he had never longed for anything in his life, to kill the little scoundrel; to tear his shrieking life out of him with ruthless hands, and throw the body into the deep seas, there, for the first time in its existence, to be made offenceless and pure. The second was Deirdre herself. So far as he could think in that pressed journey over the rough road, holding the girl up with all his strength, he was beginning to realize, through some deep intuition such as only lovers know, that he had wronged her in his thought, when he flung away from her that day upon the shore, and told her, in bitter mockery, that she might “tell her tale to the marines.” Without question, he believed it now. He knew that, for his frantic jealousy of that student husband of hers, there had been no foundation.

As for Fursey, whatever his ill intentions might have been, Deirdre had so far escaped them. Thus much she told him, in the short, hurried sentences that gave him the history of the last few terrible days.

She was his—all his. But if he had been a little less quick to guess the significance of her song, on the lips of the mountain men—if he had not been able to find the way to the town—if he had been even a little later in arriving—the best he could have hoped for would have been to know that his love was wandering, terrified, unprotected, in dark forests, full of wild cannibal natives of the bush; the worst would have been to find her in Fursey’s power.

He held her tighter at the thought, and drew her on more quickly.

It was well not to speak too much, in these perilous places. The New Cumberland native, wandering at night in search of enemies had, he well knew, a habit of firing at random in the direction of any sudden sound. Respect for human life among the natives of the New Cumberlands there was, to his certain knowledge, none; among the whites, very little.

"If I had the country!" was his sudden thought, "how I could tame it!"

But no one had the country, and the cannibals, titular owners, were abroad that night, and Fursey, worse than any cannibal, was at that moment making his way towards them on the track, as fast as he could go. Conn might, for Deirdre's sake, have reluctantly avoided encounter with him, had it been possible to travel by any other way. It was not possible. The dense tropic forest, hard enough to penetrate in daylight, with the aid of clearing knife and axe, was hopeless to travel through by night. The track was their only way.

Now the moon began to rise, showing faintly at first through the dense screen of trees, and afterwards, taking with one leap the ascent into full air. The track was a ribbon of silver, the forest a velvet wall. Conn looked anxiously ahead. It would not do to be surprised by Fursey.

"We'll halt for a minute," he whispered to Deirdre, totally unconscious after his male fashion, of her sensitive shrinking back from observation, now that the light had come. "Best to hear him before he hears us."

"What—what are you going to do?" asked the

girl anxiously. She felt much as if she had captured a thunderbolt, and tied it to her ear. It dragged her along—but whither would its wild, unchecked, untameable course take it? What disasters would it let loose? No thought of begging or remonstrance came to her. She knew Conn too well. If he was going to kill Fursey, there on the road at her feet, he would do it, and no man nor woman, God nor devil, could stop him.

Conn hesitated. He knew what his pounding blood desired, cried out for. But—

“No Red Indian business” rang in his ears. Much though he chafed against Blackbury’s restraining hand, he respected it; respected tough John Bull himself. Blackbury was in the right. Killing was murder—after all—even in the New Cumberlands, even when punishment could not follow.

Besides—Deirdre! To kill a man in fight because of what he had done to her—what would be said? Only too well he knew.

No, Fursey should live. But it should not be to enjoy life; to reign any longer as King upon Wawaka, to carry off women, white and black, and brutalize everyone with whom he came in contact. Conn had made up his mind. It might be, from what Deirdre had told him, that there could never be marriage between him and her. That was as it must be; he would not think about it yet. But the man who had tried to take her from him—had all too nearly done it—would not remain to triumph over him.

As knights of old had been used to do, he loosed his lady’s arm, and led her to the side of the road.

“Get in among the trees,” he told her. “Hide till I come back for you.”

She did not cling to him with her hands, but her eyes, in the waxing moonlight, held him.

"If you don't come back . . . " she breathed.

"I shall. But if I don't, you must hide till morning, and try to get down to the coast. Take my knife; it's big enough to be some use." He buckled it round her waist looked at her, made to speak again, but shut his lips. He wrung her hand, and left her.

There was the sound of his footsteps, soft and cautious, for a minute or two, and then silence. The moon climbed higher over the maupei trees. Thin snakelike rustlings sounded in the forest. A lizard woke and made a chirping noise, like kisses falling rapidly.

"That lizard," remembered Deirdre, "chirps when it hears something that one can't hear oneself. . . . What has it heard?"

She strained her ears, but could hear nothing—nothing, save the crackle of tiny twigs where tiny things went walking, and the snake-sounds, and the kissing sound of the lizard.

Then, quite a long time after, came the sound of steps upon the track. Conn was returning, alone. She saw him, helmet off, and head thrown back, to let the night-wind play upon his face. His queer dry hair seemed to be standing almost straight. There was a look about him of fires but recently quenched; something, it seemed, had blazed up fiercely, in the half hour of his absence from her, and the scorch of it still lingered. When he came close, she saw that one sleeve was torn away, and that there was a dark red bruise on his cheek.

"Have you killed Fursey?" she asked, creeping

forth into the moonlight. She was afraid of him, when he looked like this; but she loved him—God! she loved him!

He did not answer her, save by a smile. He stretched out his hand to help her from the bank by the side of the track. "Come down," he said. "The road is clear."

They travelled on again, Conn's arm supporting her. She looked at him once or twice, and saw that he was half smiling. She knew he could not have smiled like that, if his hands had been stained with blood, and her heart took ease.

They came to a small clearing by the way. The moon, now high and bright, poured down into it, turning it to a lake of molten silver. Plain to be seen in the midst of it was a figure tied up in a bundle, and lying on the ground. Two other figures stood near it. They were all white men.

"I suppose you know these gentry," said Conn. "This beauty tied up on the ground is Mr. Fursey; he's going to spend the next few weeks in jail in Fiji, and the next thousand years in hell. He's enough murders on his conscience—if he had one—to hang a dozen men, and I'll have a schooner full of witnesses over to Fiji with him, to prove it. We'll start in a week or so, in my boat, and I'll sail her myself."

"To Fiji!"

"To Fiji, to hell or to Connaught—anywhere that I can find justice for this brute. If there's no law in the New Cumberlands, that's a fact that works two ways. I can kidnap him and bully the witnesses, and do any dashed thing I like, to get him hung. These are two of them, but they're not going to Fiji. They have promised me like good lit-

tle boys that they'll carry Fursey down to Meliasi for me, on condition of being let off. Fursey can't walk. He's got a sprained ankle, where he took a toss just now, and I've an idea one of his wrists is broken."

"You put my left eye out," growled one of them, whom Deirdre recognized as the wretched Smith, the other being the man she had only known as "Mac."

"Oh, no, my good man," answered Conn cheerfully. "I leave that sort of thing to Fursey. I copped you a good one that'll mark you for three weeks or thereabouts; nothing more. If you knew anything about fighting, which I swear you don't—"

"It wasn't fair play."

"What, one to three?"

"Not when you took us by surprise, and knocked out Fursey first blow, and tripped up Mac. I don't call that fighting, that circus stuff."

"I told you, you know nothing about fighting, my boy. That eye of yours is blind because it's swelled up. As for circus stuff, if there's any circus about, you're it. Get on, Joey." He gave him a slight, contemptuous kick. Smith, eyeing him furiously, picked up his end of the bundle that was Fursey—a groaning, complaining bundle it was—and, helped by Mac, took his place in front of Conn. Once more they started down the track.

Half-way, when the sun was rising, they made a camp by a stream to rest. Conn, who had been carrying a little bread-sack, strapped to one shoulder, all night, unslung it now, and brought out a loaf and a tin of meat. "I never travel without tucker," he explained. "Good thing I had this." He shared it, Deirdre was glad to see, equally among the four,

and gave the groaning Fursey water out of his helmet. She, herself, slipping away, found the pool she had been longing for, found a band of broad green satiny pandanus leaf to girdle her loose dress, found a red bush flower to twist in her hair. She washed, and smoothed, and preened herself, like one of the pigeons cooing over her head, and came out from the forest again a picturesque, if a ragged little figure. Conn threw her a glance of laughing approval.

"More than half-way now," he said. "It's the easiest half, and that cuts distance."

Noon came, and found them emerging from the forest, with the coast line full in view. They turned a corner, and there was Meliasi, huddling on the shore; and the tall green islands of Waka, Wawa and Wawaka, and the Residency island, and—

"Oh!" cried Deirdre. "Look, look!"

Conn was already looking, and so were the carriers, Mac and Smith, who had each of them let out a sudden oath as they turned the corner of the road, and came in sight of the harbour. For there, in the deep blue of the anchorage, beyond the tumbling reef, stood out the shape of a tall grey warship, flying the British flag.

"Why, she has come after all," remarked Conn. "She's been expected, and disappointed us so often, that one began to believe she wasn't ever coming. This saves me a run to Fiji in that little hooker of mine; would have taken a month, I daresay. The man-of-war'll do it in six days, easy. Fursey, you've got three weeks less to live than you had five minutes ago."

"Oh, don't," winced Deirdre. Conn only laughed.

"There's something going on," he said presently, as they drew nearer. He had amazingly long-sighted eyes; the others, although staring hard, could make out nothing of note. It seemed as if a crowd had collected near the jetty—but a crowd always did collect there on the arrival of any ship.

"What is it?" asked Deirdre, as she saw him staring, with wide excited eyes.

"Hurry, you swine!" was all his answer addressed to the carriers. He seized Deirdre by the arm, and drew her along. "I want to see," he said. "There's a point close to here—" They reached the point; it was rock, running high and clear of the road. Conn leaped up it like a deer, and stood for a minute. Then he snatched off his sun helmet and swung it wildly round his head, cheering, "Hooray, hooray!"

"Sing, 'God Save the King,' Deirdre," he called to her, and started the air himself.

Deirdre, afraid that the excitement of the night had temporarily touched his mind, nevertheless joined in, and sang the verse. At the end, Conn came down. He still held his helmet, and was waving it about.

"They've run up the Union Jack ashore," he cried. "The man-of-war has come to annex. The New Cumberlands are ours!"

"What about France?" demanded Deirdre. She had not stayed at the Residency without discovering the urgency of that question.

"Oh, we must have had to pay through the nose for her interest—big slabs of Africa, or something of the kind. Never mind, we can afford it. Glorious, glorious! This is the end of the old days in the Cumberlands."

"If this had happened a year ago, you wouldn't have had all the trouble about your secret," observed Deirdre.

"Oh—that," laughed Conn. "I forgot! See here, you Fursey, and the other swine. Want to know what I found? I found pearls—pearls by the quart, by the bucket, in a cave right alongside the dancing ground, dropped there for centuries through the cracks, under the shell-heaps, and preserved by the sea. Hey, what do you think of that?"

"Steve, Steve!" cried Deirdre, convinced now that he was really going mad.

"You wonder why I tell them? Well, this is why. You remember the big storm before the time I took you down into the cave?"

"Yes."

"It was a very big one, and it brought down lots, more than I had seen for a long time. Well, that was the last."

"Last? Of the pearls?"

"Yes. Of course I always knew it must end some day, as they had only been falling down for a certain period, and no more had come from the ground above for a long time. But I didn't think—However, the big storm did it; cleaned the place right out. Next time I went, there wasn't so much as a necklace left."

"Are you sorry?" asked the girl.

"Can't say I am; I had my whack out of it, and no one ever found out, anyhow. Now let's crack on a bit, if you feel up to it, and get into Meliasi. I'm dying to see what's going on."

"Steve," asked the girl as they neared the town, "what does this mean?" She drew her hand across

and away from her mouth, with a tearing motion, as she had seen Child do in the village.

“That? It’s the cannibal sign; means—‘Give me a man to eat.’—Why, Deirdre, are you feeling tired again? You’re as white as a sheet.”

CHAPTER XVIII

"**I** REGRET extremely," said the Commander, "that the news should have arrived by this boat. Not of course on your account," he looked towards Blackbury; a Frenchman would have bowed, "but because it deprives the Imperial Government of your services, at this critical and important point in the history of the islands."

The speech was formal, but it seemed to please John Bull. He smiled a little, and drew a breath that was somewhat like a sigh.

"I'm rather sorry too—in a way," he allowed. "Still—I've done my bit here; it may be as well to have new men for new times. And the place at home will want looking after."

"You were originally the heir?" asked the Commander, with courteous interest.

"Till my uncle married again. No one would have thought his family wouldn't survive an old beggar like me. All things come to him. . . . Well." John Bull caught back a small sigh.

"Your friends will congratulate you." The Commander's tone was less formal than before. "I—in fact some of them have already done so, through me."

"Some?" John Bull, turning his head, looked attentive.

"One at least. A very charming—the Dowager

Marchioness of Kirkpatrick, in fact. Quite young for a dowager."

Blackbury seemed to be working a sum in his head.

"Quite young," he answered presently. He changed the conversation. "This place will take some pulling into order," he said.

"Yes," replied the Commander. The thought in his mind, unspoken, was that it might be well a younger man should step in. "Of course," he remarked, "the appointment would have been offered—is offered, in fact—to you."

"I'm obliged. But the Imperial Government won't lose—rather the contrary—if—do I understand that a recommendation of mine would carry weight?"

"The greatest. You have someone in your mind?"

"If he would take it. A man with a large independent fortune — resident — varsity man — quite the—"

"Do you by any chance mean Mr. Conn?"

"I do."

"I have heard of him. I should think it would be— But you understand nothing could be promised."

"I understand," said John Bull, nodding his slow head, knowing that the matter was as good as settled. "We could have him in and sound him. But of course—no promises."

An hour later, someone came tapping eagerly at the screen before the open door of Deirdre's room.

She was lying down within. It was two days now since her return, but the weariness of the long strain and hardship she had suffered seemed to

have taken hold of her slight body, and she spent most of the time resting in her quiet room, blinds drawn down, soft sounds of the sea below coming, faint with distance, through the open doors. A great, dark melancholy was creeping over her, in these days of regained safety, that should have been so happy. After all—after all—where was the use? What was everything in the world worth, without the one thing she craved?

“Can you come out?” asked Conn’s voice. It had a new note in it—a tone of elation and excitement. “Perhaps he has heard something,” she thought, and sprang off her bed. “Something” with her always meant something about Rogers. She did not dare to tell herself what the “something” was that she really craved to hear.

Conn, waiting, drew her to a quiet corner of the verandah.

“What do you think?” he said. “I’ve had a strong hint that they will make me Administrator of the New Cumberlands—to do what I like—pull the place into order—organize native troops—burn out the wasps’ nest there on Wawaka. How do you like that?”

Deirdre, as well as the rest of the house, had heard about the chance that was removing Blackbury from the islands, and sending him home to take his place as a British land-owner. She had not, however, even guessed at the other possibility. Conn had. It had never left his mind from the moment in which he had heard of Blackbury’s retirement. It warmed his very heart; it put the crown on every ambition of his life.

To Deirdre, the news came as mingled honey and gall. Conn was to be the ruler of the New Cum-

berlands—that was right, and entirely as it should be. But who was to be his queen?

She turned white with the pain of the moment, but bravely congratulated him. “Oh, I’m glad,” she said. “You will make a splendid Administrator—and your being independent will help so much.”

“I should think it will,” agreed Conn, still self-absorbed. “I can run my own steamer, if they won’t give me one, and pay my own soldiers. Worth having, isn’t it? To write one’s name across the map of a new country. I’ll leave the New Cumberland very different from the state in which I—why, Deirdre, what is it?”

For she was crying—half with the old bitter pain of the noose about her neck and half with a new, vague feeling that the Cumberland themselves might prove a very formidable rival. Would Conn go on caring for a woman he could never marry, when he had all this to occupy his mind and his ambition?

But Conn was quite sure. “Of course, girlie,” he said, “you and I will have to run it together. Your husband? Oh, we’ll find some way. It’s impossible that there can be no way out. Don’t lose heart.” He kissed her, and left her, only half consoled.

Late in the afternoon, as she was sitting on her verandah, listening vaguely to Mrs. Carbery’s talk, which ran much upon the crown coming up in the cards, and the ship that meant luck coming in three nights in succession, she saw a bush native coming slowly, nervously, up the track that led to the house. She watched him, saw him disappear in the direction of Blackbury’s official room. It seemed a little while—it was in reality some time—before he came

out again. This time he made his way to the kitchen, as native messengers did who were ordered to go and eat, pending an answer to their messages.

Blackbury's heavy form came round the corner of the verandah. Deirdre noticed that he was looking much younger and brighter this last day or two; she almost hated him for it. She knew that John Bull's old, forgotten story was coming to life, and to a happy end. While she—it was hard, very hard, to be generous; to rejoice in the happiness of another; starving herself, for happiness denied.

"This parcel has come from inland; the messenger won't say how. He is a bushie, and he's mighty scared. I sent him to get some tucker, but he won't have any for fear it might be poisoned," remarked Blackbury. "Will you take it?"

"For me?" Deirdre held out her hand. The parcel was tied up in dried banana leaves, and fastened with cocoanut-fibre string. "What can it be?" she asked.

"Better open it and see," recommended Blackbury, who had his own feelings of curiosity on the matter.

Out of the bundle, when the strings were cut, fell a sheet of bark and a small packet, wrapped in red trade cotton—the amulet that Deirdre remembered seeing on the breast of the strange dead king, seated among his court in the temple of the inland town. She stared at it as if hypnotized.

"There's writing on the bark," prompted John Bull. Deirdre took it up. It was fine white inner bark, flattened for writing use, and it had been so used, a charcoal stick taking the place of pen or pencil. The writing began abruptly—

"This is for Deirdre. I did what I could. I hear she escaped. Fursey is caught. He threat-

ened me for years. He knew about my stay in the outer islands, and what fell to me there. I had climbed up. He threw me down. I shall never climb up again now. Their white king was dead. They wanted another. The last man refused to eat with them."

"Oh!" cried Deirdre, letting the bark sheet fall to the ground. She understood.

Blackbury picked it up, and calmly went on.

"He died. I do not know how. It was he you saw. I opened the packet. Read it. They will never kill me, but you will never hear of me again. I am dead.'"

The strange document was signed, in full—"John Hamilton Child, M. A. Oxon."

Blackbury, looking at Deirdre's troubled face, took the red packet calmly from her hand and opened it. It contained a visiting card; no more. The card, which was old and somewhat worn, read—

"Arthur Rogers,
820, Lower Leeson Street,
Dublin."

"Here," he cried to Mrs. Carbery, "bring her salts—feathers,—something—she's fainting."

For Deirdre, with one look at the card, had fallen against the back of her chair. "Hold her up," said Blackbury.

"Whethen I'll do no such an' a thing," answered Mrs. Carbery with fine contempt. "Lay her on the flure, sir. Head down. That's it. Now she's opening her eyes. Are ye better, gurl?"

"All right," said Deirdre faintly.

"Daughter of Airyan," said Mrs. Carbery, in a stage whisper. "Was that yer husband?"

"Yes," answered Deirdre. "Please let me get up, I'm quite all right. It was only the sudden shock."

"Ye will lay there," pronounced Mrs. Carbery, "till I get ye just the sign of brandy from the dining room." She went to fetch it. Deirdre accepted the Commissioner's arm to a lounge. "I'm really quite all right," she repeated.

"You don't look," observed Blackbury, "as if the news were likely to break your heart."

"He was in an asylum for years," said Deirdre. "I don't know even now how he got out. He must have escaped and changed his name, and somehow become sane enough to pass. I—I always thought—I couldn't understand, but there was something about him when I met him here—"

"Met who here?" cried Blackbury.

"I thought you knew. Mr. Gatehouse."

"Good heavens, my girl, how do you know yourself? Gatehouse is absent on leave—he has outstayed it a lot, it's true—but—"

Deirdre, silently, held him out the card. On the reverse side was a sentence, written in faint pencil—

"If anything should happen to me, take this to my legal wife, Deirdre Rogers, born Deirdre Rose. I promised never to claim her alive.

"Arthur Rogers, known as George Gatehouse."

She looked at the bit of cardboard that carried in its narrow compass the fate of her future life. She felt the noose fall from round her neck. She was free.

Out on the garden walk, the new King of Meliasi

was coming to her swiftly. Beside her stood the old King. In the far mountains, the King who had died, unknowingly, for her, sat throned and crowned, silent, with the silent dead. And the man who had knowingly, died for her, and who still lived, passed into silence.





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